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Economies Of Desire: Reading Between Toni Morrison And William Faulkner

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ECONOMIES OF DESIRE: READING BETWEEN TONI MORRISON AND WILLIAM FAULKNER

by

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970 publication of Toni Morrison's first novel, The Bluest Eye, her work has not only inspired critical praise for its unique portrayal of African-American life, it has also consistently evoked comparison to the work of William Faulkner. While Morrison studied Faulkner in college and wrote her Master's thesis on Faulkner and Woolf, she has repeatedly denied Faulkner's influence, claiming instead a strong affinity between her work and that of other black women writers and African-American cultural forms. As a white southern male writer whose novels are primarily about white southern culture, William Faulkner does seem an unlikely progenitor for an African-American woman writer from Lorain, Ohio.

This study attempts to negotiate the difficult questions of literary influence raised by such comparisons by offering a reading between selected works of Morrison and Faulkner that first acknowledges the dangers inherent in intertextual models that rely on the filial tropes. I suggest that, despite the obvious association of the term intertextuality with post-structuralist theory, intertextual reading practice often appears to be influenced by a biological model which privileges filiation. I turn to the concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis, especially those of desire, the voice and the gaze, for a way of discussing individual texts by Faulkner and Morrison, and to the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter for a model of

intertextuality that both accounts for influence and allows us to theorize beyond it.

I focus primarily on Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, and Beloved and Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses, but I also discuss Morrison's Jazz and Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and Light in August. By locating many of the intertextual sites through common reference in Morrison and Faulkner to African-American musical forms such as gospel, blues, and jazz, I suggest the possibility of an intertextual reading practice that can chart the alterity that haunts not only all intertextual relationships, but also the desiring subject him/herself.

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The most forceful, expressive cultural spokespersons of Afro-America have traditionally been those who have first mastered a master discourse--at its most rarefied metalevels as well as at its quotidian performative levels--and then, autobiographically, written themselves and their own metalevels palimpsestically on the scroll of such mastery. Their acts of mastery have sometimes moved hostilely against claims of a traditional humanism, and they have seldom been characterized by any sentiment that might unambiguously or simply be designated 'love.' (Baker, Workings 42)

The writers I had been taught to love were either male or white. And who was I to argue that Ellison, Austen, Dickens, The Brontës, Baldwin and Faulkner weren't masters? They were and are. (Morrison, qtd. in Awkward, Inspiriting [97])

'That's still not love.' (Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! 328)

What else but love? Can't I love what I criticize? (Morrison, Song of Solomon 285)

When, in 1985, Toni Morrison interrupted work on the novel Beloved to address the Yoknapatawpha Conference in Mississippi, she began her talk by saying, "I'm ambivalent about what I'm about to do" (Fowler and Abadie, Faulkner and Women 295). Although Morrison was referring to her anxiety about exposing a work in progress, her ambivalence, I would suggest, may also have stemmed from the very situation in which she found herself. Here was an African-American woman writer, immersed in writing a novel about the unspeakable subjection of her racial ancestors in the ante-bellum South, reading from this novel to an assembly of scholars dedicated to extolling and preserving the work of a white male author who traditionally has been strongly identified with dominant southern culture. It is not surprising that Morrison's articulated ambivalence extended to the figure of the white

'master' himself: "Faulkner had an enormous effect on me, an enormous effect"; but, she adds, "I'm not sure that he had any effect on my work" (296). Perhaps in this last statement Morrison is merely echoing Virginia Woolf's claim that "It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure" (73). But as the literary forefigure whom Morrison must tirelessly repress (due, perhaps, to her early critical involvement with his work),[1] Faulkner uncannily returns to haunt her, not only in the guise of a summons to "Yoknapatawpha," but in a sporadic trickle of critical articles which overtly link her work with Faulkner's[2] in spite of Morrison's own repeated emphasis on the African and African-American roots of her work. Interviewing John Edgar Wideman for television in 1992, Morrison acknowledged the burden of Faulkner as a putative literary progenitor by commiserating with Wideman on the plight of having one's work as an African-American artist subjected to comparisons with that of a white canonical author of Faulkner's stature and reputation. Moreover, even Morrison's own canonization--her receipt of the 1993 Nobel prize for literature--is somewhat overshadowed by the Nobel citation itself, which specifically places her work in the context of that of another American writer and "fellow" laureate (1950), William Faulkner.[3]

Morrison's anxiety is reflected in, or perhaps reflects, a political climate in literary studies which is

agonizingly sensitive to issues of cultural appropriation and sometimes hostilely defensive of cultural and racial boundaries. However classically educated in the dominant tradition of white North American culture, Morrison admits to "trying to write what I call Black literature" (Interview by Jones and Vinson 133) and, in a "Conversation" with Gloria Naylor, she claims a strong spiritual affinity with her black literary foremothers, some of whom she was not even familiar with when she began her writing career:

> I hadn't read [Zora Neale Hurston] until after I had written. In [black women's] efforts to establish a tradition, that bothers them a little bit. And I said, 'No, no, you should be happy about that.' Because the fact that I had never read . . . Hurston and wrote The Bluest Eye and Sula anyway means that the tradition really exists. . . . if I had read her, then you could say that I consciously was following in the footsteps of her, but the fact that I never read her and still there may be whatever they're finding, similarities and dissimilarities, whatever such critics do, makes the cheese more binding, not less, because it means that the world as perceived by black women at certain times does exist. . . . (590)

Elsewhere, in an interview with Nellie McKay, Morrison expresses her discomfort at being closely associated with

any literary tradition whatsoever:

> I am not like James Joyce; I am not like Thomas Hardy; I am not like Faulkner. I am not like in that sense. I do not have objections to being compared to such extraordinarily gifted and facile writers, but it does leave me sort of hanging there when I know my effort is to be like something that has probably only been fully expressed perhaps in music . . .. (408)

Why then--not only in view of Morrison's (almost always ambivalent) protests, but also given current politico-literary anxieties about white cultural imperialism and hegemony--why then and, perhaps more to the point, why now, an extended study of the intertextual relationship between Morrison and Faulkner?

There can be, of course, no complete and satisfying answer to such a question, no cathartic telos: having said that, however, I must confess that everything that follows in this study will of necessity be, one way or another, an attempt to establish the relevance of an intertextual study between these two authors. In proposing such a study, moreover, I intend no challenge to Morrison's explicit credo as an artist, specifically as a female African-American artist, consciously (or even unconsciously) working from within a black cultural tradition. Indeed, my critical approach both acknowledges and incorporates elements of that tradition

that Morrison has claimed are important to her work. But perhaps the best way, for now, to confront concerns regarding the ethics or correctness of an intertextual study between Morrison and Faulkner is to offer a brief explanation of what I mean by the term intertextuality.

The question of intertextuality will be dealt with at length, both practically and theoretically, in subsequent chapters; however, it is at least desirable to define the term negatively here and therefore clarify what I do not mean to convey in its use. To begin with, almost any careful use of the word "intertextuality" will distinguish it from anything that resembles "source-influence study"; therefore, while it may be possible to demonstrate that Morrison read or even critically engaged particular works written by Faulkner, an intertextual study such as this one will not seek to prove empirically and beyond the shadow of a doubt that Morrison appropriated specifically from Faulkner situations, characters, passages, etc. for use in her own work. And because I am not concerned with identifying sources or demonstrating influence per se, I do not necessarily, nor would I wish to, preclude the possibility of other significant intertextual relationships: one cannot infer, simply because my study does not include, for example, Zora Neale Hurston, that there are not profound connections to be made between Hurston's work and that of both Morrison and Faulkner. Such a study, however valuable it

might be, is simply beyond the ambitions of this project.

Furthermore, while "common sense" dictates that Faulkner's chronological/historical priority vis-à-vis Morrison is beyond dispute, I will refrain from imputing on this basis, for example, "originality" to Faulkner, "imitation" or "derivation" to Morrison. Whatever else intertextuality may be seen to be in the course of this study, the term has evident associations with post-structuralist thought which at least seeks to deconstruct such binary oppositions, even if it can never entirely dispense with them. David Lodge's clever literary joke about T. S. Eliot's influence on Shakespeare notwithstanding,[4] I hope to offer an intertextual reading that will at least suggest "the reversibility of focused text and intertext" that Owen Miller argues "could eventually lead us to think the problem of intertextual identity in more radical terms and perhaps [allow us to] begin talking of intertextual alterity" (36).

Paradoxically, however, the intertextual study that I propose will not be blind to the issues of history, race, and gender that my choice of writers inevitably raises. I believe that it would be ludicrous to suggest that texts written by an African-American woman writer during the last twenty years can be said to engage unproblematically with those of a white male modernist writer whose life and literary career ended in the early nineteen-sixties. Rather than proposing and employing an intertextual reading method that

would, at either an ideological or stylistic level, seek to homogenize the discursive practices of the two writers,[5] I will suggest the possibility of a materialist intertextual criticism that is nonetheless informed by post-structuralist language and post-humanist psychoanalytic theory. John Frow describes the practical necessity and even inevitability of such a negotiation:

> [The] indifferentiation of the concept of a generalised intertextuality can be resolved only by rethinking textuality in terms of its intrication in asymmetrical and unequal relations of force which would not, however, be simply external to the textual. . . . On the one hand there is a need to work rigorously with the concept of intertextuality in such a way as to break down the limits between the textual and an apparently external and non-textual ('contextual') domain. On the other there is the need to be constantly suspicious about the extent to which broad domains of social being can thus be incorporated within the single conceptual domain of textuality--and about how this allows us not to attend to the hard resistance of other and disparate domains of discourse. (54)

It is precisely from the "hard resistance" occasioned by the disparity in gendered and racialized power relations that

this study will take its direction. In fact, Morrison herself suggests that her own work be viewed as part of a discourse which exists in terms of such power relations:

> The major thing that binds [black] writers . . . is the clear identification of what the enemy forces are, not this person or that person and so on, but the acknowledgment of a way of life dreamed up for us by some other people who are at the moment in power, and knowing the ways in which it can be subverted. (Interview by Davis 417)

What such a view implies, at the most basic and practical level, is the reinsertion of a historically specific reader "who is able not only to situate the text in its own historicity but to read or write beyond it" (Rajan 66).

Finally, I do not propose to offer here so much a(nother) theory of intertextuality <u>per se</u> as to propose a particular strategy or mode of reading that might be labelled "<u>inter</u>textual" insofar as it recognizes and respects the silent, mapless territory implied by that term--that is, the space <u>between</u> written texts whose very claim to existence as discourse is at best problematic, at worst so utterly paradoxical as to be meaningless, the space <u>between</u> authored texts within which we all--author and critic alike--become "situated" readers even as we allow ourselves as social beings to become "written." The challenge to such a reading strategy remains to interrogate this "betweenness"

discursively without rendering its silence answerable in any uncomplicated or trivializing manner. At stake here, then, are more than just the usual theoretical quibbles that characterize discussions of the concept of intertextuality--disputes that range from assessing the roles of intentionality and influence with regard to intertextual practice to questioning the practical efficacy of the concept itself. Given the importance and sensitivity of issues that obtain in the comparison of works written by a white male canonical writer to those of a so-called "minority"[6] woman writer (one who is, nonetheless, well on the way to becoming canonized herself), I must also be sensitive to the way that some intertextual reading theories and practices inadvertently inscribe and consolidate patriarchal and/or racist discourses. As Owen Miller, alluding to Roland Barthes, reminds us, intertextuality "is not an 'innocent' term" (20).

But having argued that my conceptualization of an intertextual reading practice precludes or at least intends to preclude an assessment of Toni Morrison's work which would underprivilege, deracinate, dehistoricize, or depoliticize it, I face the still more difficult task of demonstrating the value and perhaps even the viability of this <u>particular</u> intertextual study at this <u>particular</u> time. In other words, is not the mere comparison of Morrison's work to that of Faulkner in and of itself a colonizing ges-

ture? Given Faulkner's chronological priority--or, rather, since their biographical dates overlap, seniority--vis-à-vis Morrison, is there not in the textual and critical yoking of the two names the implicit suggestion of a hierarchy, either in the sense of the worst kind of a patriarchy or in the sense of a marriage between two unequal, profoundly differentiated partners, a marriage which, by the very nature of patriarchy, cannot help but result in subjugation and oppression. I deliberately choose here to confront and, ultimately, to reject the metaphors of paternalism or marriage because, while I raise the question of desire in my title and of love in my inscriptions to this chapter, I wish to suggest a way of talking about textual/authorial relationships which, although it too finds inspiration in psychoanalytic theory, is very different from the agonistics of the Bloomean family metaphor.

> Cultural events are not best understood as if they were human beings born on a certain day; the past is not a set of such births, and time does not move like a clock, in discrete moments. If the history of science has learned to deal with the emergence problem, why not literary theory? What are the limits to employing the human life cycle as a model of literary history? (Said, The World 155)

Harold Bloom's widely-known anatomy of textual relationships--his attempt to answer the question, "How do men [sic] become poets?" (Anxiety 25)--has attracted its share of both admirers and detractors, not all of whom in the latter category are black or feminist or both. That many of them are, however, deserves our attention and analysis.

Bloom's theory of poetic influence is grounded in Freudian (and to a very limited extent, Lacanian) psychoanalytic theory, specifically in Freud's concept of the "family romance," the prototype of which is the Oedipal drama. Bloom recasts the drama in terms of successive generations of writers who must defend their poetic will (or will to poeticize) from an innate anxiety with respect to their belated arrival on the poetic scene: the Muse, having formerly visited the poetic ancestor, is seen to be (always) already slightly shopworn. The poetic impulse, therefore, is rooted in a state of infantile identification and jealousy or solipsism that must be overcome if the writer is to emerge a "strong poet":

> Poetic Influence is the sense--amazing, agonizing, delighting--of <u>other poets</u>, as felt in the depths of the all-but-perfect solipsist, the potentially strong poet. For the poet is condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of <u>other selves</u>. The poem is <u>within</u> him, yet he experiences the shame and splendor of <u>being found by</u> poems--great poems--outside him. To lose freedom in this center is never to forgive, and to learn the dread of threatened autonomy forever. (<u>Anxiety</u> 25-6)

Only by "deliberately misreading" and therefore symbolically killing the precursor poet can the "ephebe" save "himself"

from "being flooded" by literary history, from drowning in "influence" (Anxiety 57, 69). Ultimately, however, having sufficiently distorted and distanced his precursor, the "later poet . . . holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe that the wheel has come full circle" (Anxiety 15-16).

Not only is Bloom's model of literary history, with its pervasive use of the masculine pronoun and its exclusive reference to male poets, seen to be a specifically phallocentric one (it is but a small associative leap from "the dread of threatened autonomy" to "the dread of threatened castration"), it is also a specifically ethnocentric model which relies heavily and deliberately on textual relationships between major canonical--and almost by definition, Euro-American--writers. The relative scarcity of both female and non-western canonical literary figures might seem almost inherently to preclude an account of how either women or African-Americans could be "found by" (even if they are sometimes found in) the literature they read. Feminist critics have pointed out the obvious need to reinstate the role of feminine inscription and filiation (as opposed to Bloom's relegation of the feminine to the role of the male poet's Muse or the womb to be feared) and question the applicability of Freud's Oedipal model, with its insufficient attention to daughterhood, to relationships between texts written by women. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar

(Madwoman), while somewhat apologetically conceding that Bloom's theory is "not a recommendation for but an analysis of the patriarchal poetics (and attendant anxieties) which underlie our culture's chief literary movements" (47-48), have nonetheless proposed a different model for the relationship between women writers, one in which these writers are "actively seeking a female precursor" (49) rather than attempting to kill a literary forefather. Elaine Showalter characterizes this type of response to the Bloomean challenge:

> In sharp contrast to the Oedipal poetics of aggression, competition, and defense put forth by Harold Bloom, some American feminist critics have postulated a pre-Oedipal 'female poetics of affiliation,' dependent on the daughter's bond with the mother, in which intergenerational conflict is replaced by female literary intimacy, generosity, and continuity. ("A Criticism" 363)

Michael Awkward logically extends the notion of a 'female poetics of affiliation' to African-American women writers:

> The intertextual relationship between Afro-American women's novels differs markedly from the Western male systems of canonical repetition and revision. While male texts in the Afro-American canon follow a traditionally Western male pattern of textual competition, women's novels seem to

> form a more harmonious system, characterized aptly by Alice Walker's almost obsessive efforts to 'save' Zora Neale Hurston's texts and personal history from obscurity. (Inspiriting 6)

But, inspired perhaps by a strongly ego-centered American object-relations psychoanalytic theory, Awkward opposes the putatively masculine (irrespective of race, it would seem) valorization of autonomy to the putatively feminine (if not necessarily feminist) valorization of interconnectedness, without really confronting Bloom's central and ultimately solipsistic assumption of a canonical authority and insularity as represented in the overdetermined metaphor of the nuclear family. Rather than questioning the tacit approval of the idea of canon formation which is the inevitable telos of Bloom's theory of intertextual relations, Awkward would at times appear to want to exchange Bloom's family--patriarchal, white, European--for another, equally insular and exclusive, kind of family--matriarchal (or comprised of women), and potentially African-American (but sometimes comprised only of African-American women). "Canon" becomes "canons": the exclusivity of the canon is revalorized as homogeneity within many distinct and competing canons.

One result of this strategy is that, when faced with intertextual relationships between differently gendered and/or raced writers' texts, Gilbert and Gubar and Awkward abandon notions of innate feminine advocacy and surprisingly

revert to Bloomean tropes and, ironically, Bloomean appeals to competition, hegemony, and autonomy:

> just as the male artist's struggle against his precursor takes the form of what Bloom calls revisionary swerves, flights, misreadings, so the female writer's battle for self-creation involves her in a revisionary process. Her battle, however, is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against the reading of her. (Gilbert and Gubar, Madwoman 49)

According to Gilbert and Gubar, the obstacle facing the woman writer is not just her lack of female precursors, but the defamation of her gender in canonical, male-authored texts. They suggest therefore that "women must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been 'killed' into art" (17) through a revisionary reading and writing of the feminine. But the distinction that Gilbert and Gubar would like to have us make between "the world" and the female literary character is not, I think, explicitly supported in Bloom's already highly individualistic, ego-centered theory of intertextuality. Inasmuch as both male and female writers can apprehend the misrepresentation of gender roles in canonical works of literature, they are perhaps equally capable of revisionary violence and the battle-lines need not necessarily be drawn along gender lines. Moreover, Gilbert and Gubar's refusal to confront

Bloom's model ensures only that the battle remain safely within the traditional bourgeois family, so long as our view of it incorporates the roles of mother and daughter as well as those of father and son.

Admittedly, Awkward uses less violent terminology than do Gilbert and Gubar to describe such revisionary reading by African-American authors (in this case both male and female) of white-authored texts, which he calls "denigration":

> By denigration, I mean here precisely those appropriative acts by Afro-Americans which have successfully transformed by the addition of black expressive cultural features, Western cultural expressive systems to the extent that they reflect, in black 'mouths' and 'contexts' what we might call (in Bakhtinian terms) Afro-American 'intention' and 'accent.' (Inspiriting 9)

However, there is an even greater problem with the distinction that Awkward would have us make between "Western cultural expressive systems" and "black expressive cultural features," a distinction that leads him at one point to conclude that in The Bluest Eye,

> [Toni] Morrison has, through her manipulation of the white voice of the primer, through her apparent revisions of precursor texts [including Ralph Waldo Ellison's Invisible Man], and through her depiction of narrative voices as ultimately

> conjoined, added to the Afro-American literary canon another supreme example of a Genuine Black Book. (95)

Not only does Awkward appear to applaud the idea of intertextuality at the service of canon formation, but he does so precisely in Bloomean terms of exclusivity, an exclusivity explicitly based on a demonstrably culturally pure or at least purified lineage: "Genuine Black Book." By doing so, he raises a number of very troubling questions. Who arbitrates the authenticity of "black expressive cultural features" as distinct from those of "white" society? Do all African-American authors, male and female, urban and rural, southern and northern, eastern and western, share an identifiable expressive culture? To what limits can "denigration" be pushed? How "black" must a book be in order to ensure canonization? How "black" can a book be and yet remain accessible to a dispersed and diversified African-American audience, let alone a "white" one? And, finally, there is perhaps the most troubling question: can a "white" author's work "pass" as "black" by mimicking black expressive forms?

In what has by now become a classical example of an answer to the latter question, jazz musician Roy Eldridge once boasted to critic Leonard Feather that he "would be able to distinguish white musicians from Negroes" in a "blindfold" test. Eldridge failed the test, as Feather explains: "He did not even guess the 50% to which the law

of averages entitled him" (Feather 477).[7] The aestheticization, in this case, of racial difference, while it appears to legitimate claims to a tradition, merely perpetuates the idea of the biological family as a metaphor for textual relationships by analogizing inherent racial or ethnic characteristics to an overdetermined aesthetic morphology, thereby obscuring what I believe are more important issues, such as equitable access for minorities to resources for cultural production and meaningful recognition for their work, both financial and critical, by other members of society.

However well-intentioned, attacks on the cultural exclusivity of "the canon" which result in an appeal to alternate, equally homogenous and potentially hegemonic traditions can be, I think, both self-refuting and self-defeating. Gilbert and Gubar themselves argue that:

> the canon with which such [feminist] critics as [Annette] Kolodny and [Jane] Tompkins counter the traditional American Pleiade is often based on an equally strong--if different--ideology, an ideology which defines excellence as the inscription of communal, conventionally female virtues like maternal nurturance, sisterly supportiveness, pious purity, and emotional expressiveness. In their own way, therefore, the feminist successors of the male Americanists who

> first defined the contours of our literature are undertaking acts of evaluation that are as ideologically bound as those for which they criticize their masculinist precursors. (Madwoman 150)

Predictably, the same argument could be and has been employed against the formation of an authoritative canon based upon either an implicit or explicit prescriptive racial or ethnic ideology.[8] While the strategy of segregating, in order to recuperate, characterize, and evaluate literary works by (racially heterogeneous) women and (gendered) minority writers has proven and may continue to prove enormously valuable and productive, it has failed so far to produce a coherent theory of intertextual relationships among women and minority writers and canonical writers.

Perhaps we need to return to Bloom--to examine more closely the strengths, as well as the biases and weaknesses of his theory--in order to begin to renegotiate such relationships. One of the reasons that Bloom's Freudian-inspired theory works so well for a discussion of the relationships between male poets and their forefathers is because Freud so carefully and exhaustively theorized the relationships between sons and fathers and, peripherally, sons and mothers. Bloom's account of interpoetic relations vis-à-vis the Oedipal configuration, for all its shortcomings, is obviously strengthened by the complexity of Freud's theoretical model with its emphasis on filial

anxiety and ambivalence. But as Bloom uses it, the term "family romance," while it may in fact be an inaccurate translation of Freud's "Familienroman" (Gay 297), nonetheless suggests the essence of his reading of the Oedipal complex as a potential filial love story and his postulation of poetic succession, with its apparent cathartic dissolution of the complex, as the filial love story par excellence. But however much Bloom's critics and indeed Bloom himself emphasize the importance of masculine "defense" mechanisms in his model, the poetic anxiety which is at the root of Bloom's theory seems to be, in strictly Freudian terms, pre-Oedipal and therefore pre-symbolic:

> We can say that anxiety and desire are the antimonies of the ephebe or beginning poet. The anxiety of influence is an anxiety in expectation of being flooded. Lacan insists that desire is only a metonymy, and it may be that desire's contrary, the anxiety of expectation, is only a metonymy also. The ephebe who fears his precursor as he might fear a flood is taking a vital part for a whole, the whole being everything that constitutes his creative anxiety, the spectral blocking agent in every poet. Yet this metonymy is hardly to be avoided; every good reader desires to drown, but if the poet drowns, he will become only a reader. (Anxiety 57)

Not to put too fine a point on what is, after all, only an analogy, Bloom here distinctly feminizes the literary tradition: all of the ephebe's precursors may indeed be male poets, but collectively they comprise a womb into which the ephebe is in danger of being drawn and pacified.[9] Whereas paternity is always empirically uncertain and therefore subject to the type of revisionary soul-searching implied in his model, Bloom's unexpected reversion to (and unmistakeable revulsion toward) the maternal matrix suggests a longing for a pre-symbolic reassurance of origin rather than a search for symbolic alliance. While Bloom alludes to the Borgean maxim that "poets create their precursors" (Anxiety 19), they appear to him to do so in a strictly conservative, Eliotic, manner:

> Antithetical criticism must begin by denying both tautology and reduction, a denial best delivered by the assertion that the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but another poem--a poem not itself. And not a poem chosen with total arbitrariness, but any central poem by an indubitable precursor, even if the ephebe never read that poem. Source study is wholly irrelevant here. (70)

On the contrary, I would argue, source study is entirely relevant to Bloom's model, especially in light of Bloom's use of the words "central poem" and "indubitable precursor," and in view of the way that he has previously feminized

(womb-anized) the literary canon. Bloom's theory, it seems to me, never escapes the "pre-Oedipal" phase, never crosses over into the Symbolic, because the ephebe never really questions, let alone rejects identification with, the authoritative "source" of his being: discovering his father in the mother, he is assured of his legitimacy and therefore his (specular) identity, and for all of his strategic and self-preserving "swerves" and "misprisions," he remains fixed in a state of blissful filial love, complacent in the womb of (white European) tradition. Thus, as Clayton and Rothstein contend, Bloom "unashamedly employs influence to construct a severely limited canon, in which strong poets compete only with other similarly strong figures" (9). Or, as Henry Louis Gates puts it, "[a] fiction of tradition, for the writer of a culture of color, was the literary equivalent of the 'grandfather clause'" (Loose Canons 48).

If I have made Bloom's ephebe over into something of a narcissistic bourgeois brat, I do not apologize, as I do so to good purpose. What I wish to point up is, first, that to reject Bloom's model on the grounds claimed by some of the African-Americanist and feminist critics I have quoted above is to ignore (and by ignoring, to valorize) its clearly non-competitive (or falsely competitive) aspects and, indeed, pre-Oedipal structure. In other words, many of those who criticize Bloom's use of the Freudian model have read un-critically Bloom's own misreading of Freud. On the other

hand, to embrace Bloom's theory as a model for textual relationships is to be complicit with a complacent, phallocentric, and distinctly western notion of the family that can hardly be seen to be a desirable model for canonical revision or a representative model for intertextuality (even if it may be, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, an adequate representation of Euro-American literary history) particularly for those texts written by authors of "identifiably" different races and genders.[10] One cannot help but recall the neo-colonialist overtones of the language which Ralph Ellison employs when he claims that "While one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as an artist, choose one's 'ancestors'" (qtd. in Payne 3). In particular, the employment of familial metaphors to describe textual relations between the works of a white male author of the American south and an African-American female writer inevitably raises the spectre of almost three hundred years of economic, cultural, and sexual exploitation under the aegis of an institution that paradoxically both enforced and condemned miscegenation while it systematically eroded the traditions of the African-American family.[11] It should go without saying that Bloom's ephebe never dreamed such a dangerous passage into (literary) history.

Bloom's theory of textual interrelationships is, of course, only one of many (and perhaps an outdated one at that), and the attention which I have devoted to it here may

seem inordinate. On the other hand, Bloom is no "straw man": as I hope to have pointed out, some of the assumptions from which he (and others before and after him) works continue, in one way or another, to pervade our thinking about specific intertextual relationships. We find traces of the notion of a textual tradition modelled upon (Bloom's misreading of) the dynamics of filial love and identification in many of the efforts of feminist and African-American theorists to support "other" traditions and "other" canons as though the texts of which they speak naturally and unproblematically align themselves according to the (assigned[12]) race and/or gender of their authors.[13] Insofar as such a notion of textual filiation serves the purposes of homogeneous canon formation it inevitably oversimplifies intertextual relationships: such relationships <u>within</u> the (increasingly narrowly) defined canon are, by definition, mutually supportive and sympathetic, while relationships <u>between</u> the works in the new canon(s) and those outside it (them) are, if they are confessed to at all, essentially hostile. As long as models of canonicity and textual affiliation bear vestigial traces of the filial metaphor, the affectionate ambivalence <u>within</u> the family of white Euro-American tradition will inevitably be re-theorized <u>outside of it</u> in terms of an Imaginary identification/differentiation or love/hate dichotomy.

The path I have charted from intertextuality to liter-

ary history via Bloom may appear digressive, but it is perhaps unavoidable, given the specifity of my project--reading between the works of two authors who, for reasons ranging from their own personal biographies to the ideological concerns of their critics, occupy very different positions in the literary history of the United States--and the objections which might be raised against it. While I have indicated that the legitimacy of this history itself has for some time been under siege, I have also suggested that the form many of these attacks have taken is one which does not often question the governing trope of filial legitimacy in historical construction itself. Whether or not it is true, as Henry Louis Gates suggests, that "[V]irtually no one . . . believes that the texts written by black authors cohere into a tradition because the authors share certain innate characteristics" (Loose Canons 100), some revisionary gestures have appeared to rely upon the idea of an unequivocally classifiable and unified ontological subject whose experience and heritage qualifies him or her to speak for others who share certain identifiable bio-logical/-graphical traits and, moreover, to do so from within a singular ideology and classifiable aesthetic tradition. For those who hold this point of view with regard to the literary production of women and/or African-Americans or white males of the American South (although these are, of course, not the only potential categories), Toni Morrison and William Faulkner

occupy sites in distinctly different and even hostile and perhaps irreconcilable literary traditions or families.

While it is perhaps impossible and arguably undesirable to ignore the most fundamental questions of an author's biography when considering his or her work, it would be fruitful, I think, to alleviate the enormous pressure already inherent in an intertextual study such as this one by at least drawing attention to the ideological dangers inherent in employing common-place tropes of biological filiation as a means of interconnecting texts. We have already seen how this severely limits the possibilities for intertextual reading by eliding the many nuanced differences to be found within the legitimate, putatively homogeneous group and thereby emphasizing irreducible differences between the members of its own group and those outside it. But whether it is possible, given "the pervasiveness of familial metaphors and of the family as vantage point in our culture and in its analytic methodologies" (Hirsch 12), to dispense with filiation or the family as metaphors for literary relationships or, more to the point, whether it is possible to dispense with, or at least de-emphasize, the family as a metaphor for literary relationships and yet to continue to work within a psychoanalytic paradigm,[14] will be a question for my next chapter. Only by doing so, however, can we clear the way for a truly political intertextual reading.

'the descendants of Faulkner's nursemaid'

Before leaving Bloom's psychoanalytically based theory of literary history and intertextuality for the time being, I would like to suggest the impasse that is one inevitable outcome of the application of the dichotomous love/hate aspect of filiation not only to relaticnships between authored texts, but relationships between readers and texts. When Bloom comments in his introduction to the Modern Critical Views study of Faulkner that "no feminist critic will ever be happy with Faulkner" (1), he suggests by implication the image of an entire school of readers who are happy with him--by definition non-feminist men and women--romping ecstatically through Faulkner's oeuvre, chortling as they turn the pages, saving their deepest belly-laughter for what they consider to be the most misogynistic passages. Given fairly recent claims regarding Faulkner's racism, as well as his misogyny, one can extrapolate along these same lines opposed groups of "unhappy" and "happy" African-Americanist readers of Faulkner. But, we might be tempted to ask, from what position does Bloom himself read and speak? Is Bloom "happy" or "unhappy" with Faulkner? To be more blunt, does he love him or hate him?[15] Or is he just more comfortable "inside" the family of writers, readers, and critics who are happy to read Faulkner as someone who, they believe, makes feminists unhappy?[16] To what position does that banish readers and critics of Faulkner who are

women, or men and women who are feminist; by extrapolation, to what position does that banish men and women of color, or men and women, colored or white, who are African-Americanists?

That there exist readers and critics of Faulkner who are feminist or who are African-Americanist or who are both might suggest to Bloom only that there are a large number of unhappy critics of Faulkner. And, indeed, some of these critics <u>are</u> extremely unhappy with him:

> as male writers like Faulkner, Miller, and Wylie mounted intensified attacks on female autonomy, their female contemporaries defended themselves with aggressive fantasies of physical power. . . . Indeed, the plots constructed by these writers are often so critical of or punitive towards their female protagonists that their authors would seem to have internalized just the horror at independent womanhood which marks the writings of literary men from Faulkner to Wylie. (Gilbert and Gubar, <u>No Man's Land</u> 101

> My own slight attachment to William Faulkner was rudely broken by realizing, after reading statements he made in <u>Faulkner in the University</u>, that he believed whites superior morally to blacks; that whites had a duty (which at their convenience they would assume) to 'bring blacks along' politi-

cally. . . . He [Faulkner] also thought that a black man's intelligence is directly related to the amount of white blood he has. (Walker, In Search 19, 20)

In 1932 William Faulkner saw fit to include this sentence in a description of a painted sign in his novel Light in August. He wrote:

> But now and then a negro nursemaid with her white charges would loiter there and spell them [the letters on the sign] aloud with that vacuous idiocy of her idle and illiterate kind.

. . . . Not only does his remark typify the extremely negative ways in which Afro-American women have been portrayed in literature, scholarship, and the popular media, but it also points to the destructive white-male habit of categorizing all who are not like themselves as their intellectual and moral inferiors. The fact that the works in which such oppressive images appear are nevertheless considered American 'masterpieces' indicates the cultural-political value system in which Afro-American women have been forced to operate and which, when possible, they have actually opposed. . . . And then, too, one wonders about the accumulated generations of psychic damage

> which the descendants of Faulkner's nursemaid must heal before being able to put pen to paper, thinking, acting, (and writing) like the wonderful Black women we are. (Hull and Smith xviii, xxx)

It would be presumptuous of me to dispute with Gilbert and Gubar, Walker, or Hull and Smith that Faulkner's texts contain portrayals or ideas that might be termed sexist and/or racist: these critics have clearly stated and documented their opinions and, as women and African-American women, they occupy legitimate cultural positions from which to respond to the question of Faulkner's sexism and racism.

But what of women or African-Americans who claim to read and admire Faulkner's work, who devote time to the study of Faulkner's texts, or who cite certain aspects of these texts as inspirations to their own creative writing? Are all of them, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, internally colonized, so convinced of the "truth" of their own inferiority that they are unable to see or write beyond the stereotypes? Does just such a neocolonialist mentality explain Ellison's rejection of his "relative," Richard Wright, and his adoption of Faulkner and Hemingway as "ancestors"? On the other hand, must any engagement with white male texts by feminist or African-Americanist (as opposed to non-politicized female and African-American) critics and writers be seen as antagonistic, lest these writers be charged with disloyalty or false consciousness?

Or, alternatively, must we defend what may be seen as sympathetic or non-antagonistic tendencies in these writers by attempting to exonerate William Faulkner from charges of misogyny and racism?

It should come as no surprise that various critics, at various times, have resorted to all of the strategies listed above. For now, though, I would like briefly to address the last and perhaps most startling possibility. Although it is not the purpose of this study either to bring charges of misogyny and racism against Faulkner or to defend him from them, neither is it possible to ignore them altogether or to pretend that one's perception of Faulkner's attitudes toward women and African-Americans is irrelevant to what follows. To the contrary, Faulkner's representation of the African-American woman and Morrison's response to it are central to my thesis. But just as I hope to demonstrate that reading between Morrison and Faulkner has the effect of altering the reader's vision of both writers' texts, I want to suggest here that over fifty years of received Faulkner criticism has had the unavoidable effect of mediating and to some extent ossifying current popular estimations of Faulkner's work, such as those alluded to by Bloom in his introduction to Modern Critical Views, about Faulkner's views vis-à-vis gender and race. Dominick LaCapra cautions against an uncritical reading of the heavily mediated (canonical) text:

> the crucial problem may not be whether a given

> artifact is part of an established canon (anticanonical approaches are in the process of creating their own canons) but whether it has been subjected to canonical interpretations and uses that are open to question. The point may not be simply to reject a Bildungsideal; it may be to give it a new shape by bringing it into contact with intellectual and sociopolitical issues from which it has often served as a refuge. (LaCapra, History 134)

LaCapra reminds us that the haven of canonicity entails also a kind of enslavement to the critical judgements which arbitrate (and in their turn are served by) the process by which canons are formed and maintained. This may be particularly enlightening in the case of Faulkner, whose early reputation was that of a minor, regional artist until his work was championed by the southern Agrarian critics (Schwartz), almost exclusively white males who understandably identified with--or, in Bloomean terms, "found themselves in"--Faulkner and emphasized the traditional white masculine values expressed in Faulkner's work. More recent criticism has sought to demonstrate that such identification is possible only if one ignores the complexity of Faulkner's texts and the wide range of cultural and ideological representations that they offer. One might be tempted to argue from this perspective, then, in response to

Gilbert and Gubar or Gloria Hull above, that they have mistaken the ideology of a character or a narrator or even of a critically mediated reading for the ideology of the text or its author.

But, on the other hand, are recent "revisionary" readings of Faulkner's oeuvre--readings which openly confront issues of gender and race in these works and call attention to an ambivalence and indeterminacy which potentially absolve Faulkner from ideological censure--exempt from or somehow above the arbitration process which governs the selection and preservation of canonical texts?[17] Or do they simply serve it in their own way, using the critical tools of a different generation of scholars at a different point in time to validate, nonetheless, the aesthetic choices of their predecessors? In other words, how do we adjudicate the politics of Faulkner's texts without continuing to adjudicate the politics of his mediators, without adjudicating our own ideological biases? And to what end? Simply labelling Faulkner a racist or a misogynist will not suddenly make his work disappear from the canon of American literature. But neither will attempting to exonerate him from these charges alleviate the pain of those, like Alice Walker, who feel that they have suffered personally from or have been betrayed by what they construe as racist or misogynist comments.

These issues are indeed challenging, and one must

remain sensitive to them, but I have also suggested that they arise from a false dilemma which forces us to decide relationships on the basis of a radical and untenable notion of a fixed representative identity, using the binary schema that attends such labelling of inside/outside, identity /differentiation, love/hate to describe them. The far-reaching implications of this dualism can be seen not only in the way we organize competing canons and received criticism, but in what Gates calls the "representation quandary" in which the "conflation of textual with political representation" (Loose Canons 176, 177) results in an inordinate and often oppressive burden upon the minority author/text to represent collective minority interests, not incidentally just as Faulkner's work in the past became, for one group of critics, exemplary of the minority (white masculinist) interests of the American South. This burden now falls heavily on African-American writers, as Gates points out:

> If black authors are primarily entrusted with producing the proverbial 'text of blackness,' they become vulnerable to the charge of betrayal if they shirk their duty. (Loose Canons 179)

Hazel Carby underlines the absurdity of such a burden when she points out that

> [t]he same people who would argue in very sophisticated critical terms that literary texts do not directly reflect or represent reality but recon-

> struct and re-present particular historical realities find themselves demanding that the identity of a social group be represented by a single novel. ("The Canon," 37)

While neither Gates nor Carby denies a politics of textuality, both clearly evidence a distrust of the idea of a simplistic, one-to-one correspondence among the politics of a writer, his or her racial/ethnic/gender community, and his or her text as it negotiates all facets of its production, dispersal, and reception. "Identity" politics have already played an important hegemonic role in canon formation and while they can continue to play an important strategic role in gaining a political voice, in fostering the admission and hiring of minorities to public institutions, and even in securing places for overlooked books on university curricula, it can be a divisive and even ghettoizing force once these objectives have begun to be achieved.

Questions of politics, however, do not magically vanish when, for example, Toni Morrison's Beloved shares shelf space with William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! As a writer who might be viewed both as a(n aesthetic) descendant of Faulkner and as a "descendant of Faulkner's nursemaid," Morrison occupies a complex and challenging position vis-à-vis the Faulknerian corpus, one which allows and perhaps even compels her to challenge not just Faulkner's portrayals of African-Americans, and particularly African-American

women, but also the very construction of race and gender in American culture. In the following study of selected works by Morrison and Faulkner, I will use the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore the role of the gaze and the voice in constituting racial and gendered subjectivities, but I will also attempt to negotiate the questions raised in this introduction by retheorizing the intertextual relationship in terms of an understanding of the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter that recognizes its potential to explain the basis for interpersonal struggle and to imagine an intersubjective space beyond the love-hate dichotomy of transferential, or influence, relations. By heeding Morrison's claim that "her effort is to be <u>like</u> something that has probably only been fully expressed in music" (Interview by McKay 408) and by locating many of the intertextual sites for my discussion through common reference in the works of Morrison and Faulkner to African-American musical forms such as gospel, blues, and jazz, I suggest the possibility of an intertextual practice that can chart, using the very terms by which Morrison herself tends to define the signifying aspects of her work, the unspoken, but not unvoiced, alterity that haunts not only all intersubjective relationships, but the desiring subject her/himself.

NOTES

[1] Morrison wrote about Faulkner and Virginia Woolf in her MA thesis (Cornell 1955), entitled "Virginia Woolf's and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated."

[2] See Hutcheon (A Theory); Cowart; Werner ("Minstrel"); Willis ("Eruptions"); Duvall ("Authentic Ghost Stories," "Doe Hunting"). See also O'Brien for a completely spurious and unflattering comparison of Morrison's Jazz with Faulkner's Light in August.

[3] Not only does the Nobel citation itself mention Morrison's work in relationship to that of Faulkner, but subsequent media coverage played up the connection: "her familiarity with Faulkner's work proved invaluable. Incantatory Faulknerian sentences crop up in all her novels . . ." (Time 18 Oct 1993, 64).

[4] Persse McGarrigle, a character in David Lodge's novel Small World, has written his dissertation on Eliot's influence on William Shakespeare.

[5] Although my study appears to conform to what Werner Sollors has called a "polyethnic" critique, I do not wish to suggest, à la Sollors, that such an intertextual study will of necessity allow us to reach a consensus on what constitutes an American literary tradition.

[6] Sylvia Wynter points to the absurdity of the term "minority" when it encompasses "the sub-category 'women'": "such is the force of the shared semantic charter through which we

interdepend, that we all know what we mean when we use the category minority to apply to an empirical majority" (234).

[7] See also Henry Louis Gates, "'Authenticity.'"

[8] Henry Louis Gates defends the project of developing a black canon: "many black authors read and revise one another, address similar themes, and repeat the cultural and linguistic codes of a common symbolic geography. For these reasons, we can think of them as forming literary traditions" (Loose Canons 101). However, his use of the plural--traditions--suggests that he is somewhat uneasy about broad categorizations. His argument for the strategic uses of canonization is much more forceful.

[9] Gilbert and Gubar arrive at a similar conclusion via an examination of the "uncanny" in Coleridge's Kubla Kahn: "the relationship of . . . qualified and anxious mastery to the uncanny otherness of the feminine suggests that Harold Bloom's theory of romanticism as primarily an aesthetic defense against the strong son's belatedness to his literary fathers needs to be supplemented by an awareness that such belatedness is made more horrifying by the poet's fear of feminization or of engulfment by the unfathomable forces of the feminine" ("The Mirror" 163).

[10] Interestingly, Toni Morrison does not shirk the label of "miscegenation" when discussing canonical insurgency from African-American texts, and in fact uses the word to draw attention to white insecurity regarding canonical challenge: "For the present turbulence seems not to be about the flexibility of a canon, its range among and between Western countries, but

about its miscegenation. The word is informative here and I do mean its use" ("Unspeakable" 6).

[11] See Spillers ("Permanent Obliquity") for a historical discussion of the African-American family. Cf. Toni Morrison qtd. in Jackson: "Slavery depends on the absence of a family. you can't have families if you're going to have slavery" (139).

[12] Insofar as the categories of "gender" and "race" are constructed to meet the needs of both the definers and those who are defined. Witness the tendency in North American societies to designate as "black" rather than "white" or "brown" or "beige" anyone known to be of African-American lineage, no matter the relative proportions of "black" or "white" blood or whether their skin color is dark or fair. See also Gates ("'Authenticity'") regarding "passing."

[13] The inevitability, though, of establishing such relationships is probably endemic to the process of canon formation itself: "as John Guillory has also pointed out, the reason the debate over the canon entailed the resurrection of the author was simply that it required a representative of a social constituency: the debate over canon formation was concerned, in the first instance, with authors, not texts" (Loose Canons 182).

[14] Deleuze and Guattari suggest an alternative to this model in Anti-Oedipus; however, the revolutionary aspects of their work, I think, are undermined by a Utopian, and therefore prescriptive and teleological, fervor.

[15] By way of contrast, see Bloom's discomfort with Alice Walker in Modern Critical Views: Alice Walker.

[16] In light of what I will discuss later as Bloom's debt to American ego psychology, it is interesting to hear what Lacan has to say about "happiness": the autonomous ego "does solve the problem of the analyst's being. A team of egos no doubt less equal than autonomous (but by what trademark do they recognize in one another the sufficiency of their autonomy?) is offered to the Americans to guide them towards happiness [English in the original], without upsetting the autonomies, egoistical or otherwise, that pave with their non-conflictual spheres the American way of getting there" (Écrits 231). Lacan also says of American psychoanalytic technique that it "has been so summarily reduced to a means of obtaining 'success' and to a mode of demanding 'happiness' that it should be pointed out that this constitutes a repudiation of psychoanalysis" (Écrits 127).

[17] Minrose C. Gwin's The Feminine and Faulkner is one of the more extreme examples of this kind of project.

CHAPTER ONE: REFIGURING INTERTEXTUALITY ACROSS GENDER AND RACE

I am an invisible [wo]man. . . . I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination--indeed, everything and anything except me. . . . (Ellison, The Invisible Man)

The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work not to see this. (Morrison, Playing in the Dark 17)

You cant know yet. You cannot know yet whether what you see is what you are looking at or what you are believing. (Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! 392)

What one looks at is what cannot be seen. (Lacan, Four 182)

On June 2, 1910, Quentin Compson takes a final, fateful stroll through a fictional Cambridge, Massachusetts. At the bridge where, later that day, he will take his own life, he meets three boys who are curious about his identity:

> 'Are you a Canadian?' the third said. . . .
>
> 'Canadian?'
>
> 'He dont talk like them,' the second said. 'I've heard them talk. He talks like they do in minstrel shows.'
>
> 'Say,' the third said. 'Ain't you afraid he'll hit you?'
>
> 'Hit me?'
>
> 'You said he talks like a colored man.' (The Sound and the Fury 73)

Quentin does not respond to the alleged racial slur: he has other, presumably more important, things on his mind. But what this brief passage contains, I think, is a parable of identity, an articulation of which may serve to illuminate several of the difficulties and challenges confronting an intertextual study such as the one I propose.

First and most obviously, the passage above appears to raise a question about the identity of the fictional character Quentin Compson. In attempting to situate Quentin in the context of their own limited experience, the boys are forced to rely upon contradictory aural and visual data: Quentin looks "white" but his voice sounds "colored" to the inexperienced northern ear. In a pointed irony, one of the boys, no doubt prompted by the visual clue of the stranger's "whiteness," turns even further north for the answer, and guesses that Quentin is Canadian. This conjecture is quickly dismissed, and replaced by the speculation that Quentin "'talks like they do in minstrel shows.'" To the reader, however, for whom Quentin's speech is not rendered on the page as phonetically different from that of the boys, the question of Quentin's accent is only ever implicit. In fact, Quentin's "voice" in the novel--phonetically and grammatically, if not always syntactically--is a normative one, against which the reader can, for example, distinguish and evaluate the speech of a "colored" man (53). The reader, therefore, can neither see nor hear the cause of the boys'

consternation, although she knows, if only through contextual evidence, that Quentin is a white Southerner. To be more precise, the reader assumes, based on conventions of reading, that this Quentin is the identical Quentin who, earlier in the novel, could speak of himself as distinct from "them": "colored people" or "niggers" (53). As in all examples of dramatic irony, the effect of the discrepancy between what a character knows and what the reader knows is paradoxical: the reader is drawn into the novel as a participant in enacting meaning even as she is distanced from it by being made conscious of her privileged status as reader.

But there is yet another irony here: the suggestion that Quentin "talks like they do in minstrel shows" is not precisely the same as saying that he "talks like a colored man" since the reader knows (or may know) there is a good possibility that the minstrel show the boy alludes to was performed by white men in black-face. So, responding to an accent that signals Quentin's difference from them (an accent that is textually silent and therefore obscured from the reader) and drawing from their naive experience of a performance in which racial mimicry may (or may not) have played a significant part, the boys playfully interrogate Quentin's identity even as they begin to (de)construct that identity (and the racial categories on which it might depend) for the reader. But while they attempt first to cast the stranger against type--or in this case, against

race--they ultimately betray their knowledge of his "genuine" racial status with a conspiratorial nod--"Ain't you afraid he'll hit you"--to implicit notions of white racial hegemony.

The exploration of Quentin's identity in this very brief but ideologically charged passage provides a glimpse of what is both most compelling and most disturbing about the treatment of race in Faulkner's fiction. On the one hand, the exchange between the three boys challenges our very notions of what constitutes racial identity: motivated by a perceived difference in Quentin's speech, the boys are compelled to assign him a label by which to account for and understand this difference. The potentially subversive significance of the suggestion that, aurally at least, whites and blacks in the south share an identity is problematised by our inability to determine whether or not the minstrel show referred to by the second and third boys was performed by white or black men. However, this radical move--the displacement of racial identity from the visual field to an aural one--is quickly checked by the third boy's fear that Quentin might be offended at the suggestion that "'he talks like a colored man.'" What had appeared to be a movement in the text toward a deconstruction of the very terms by which racial difference (discrimination) is sustained is revealed to be a mirage, a chimera, foreshadowed even in Quentin's earlier observation that "a nigger is not

a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among" (53).

The implications of my reading of this short passage for a consideration of the works of an African-American woman writer vis-à-vis Faulkner are, I think, enormous. Through an almost comic obfuscation of personal identity, Faulkner's text slyly thematizes conventions of both racial and literary identity: how are we to know, as readers of texts as well as readers of people, what it is we are looking at, hearing, even touching? What does it mean to sound "colored," to look "white"? What happens when the aim of a text to represent (conventional) difference is impeded not only by restraints of literary convention (notably the convention of contextual reading), but also by the extension of reference to a(n unelaborated) cultural field (the minstrel show as intertext)? What, indeed, is a "white" text, a "black" text? These are questions which do not have simple answers, as I have suggested previously. Nor are these questions new: the controversy is at least as old as the minstrel show, perhaps as old as representation itself. The relevance of this debate to my project is not entirely tangential, but the questions of identity and difference which inform it are essential to an understanding not only of the representation of race in Faulkner and Morrison, but also of (inter)textuality itself. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, a

text which enacts the minstrel show that is merely alluded to in The Sound and the Fury, transforming that one quickly defused moment of racial indeterminacy into the impetus of an entire novel.

In the next chapter I will suggest that Absalom anticipates and explores some of the fundamental questions posed by a concept of intertextuality and that it does so, inevitably, through challenging our very notion of textuality, or textual identity. I will also return in that chapter to the issue of how racial identity is constituted in Absalom, Absalom! to suggest that perhaps Faulkner, not unlike the three boys Quentin Compson meets in The Sound and the Fury, retreats from the implications of narrative indeterminacy to a somewhat less radical position. But in this chapter I will explore various paradigms, from minstrelsy to the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter, which might assist us in understanding the complex and ambivalent intertextual and extratextual relationship between Faulkner and at least one African-American woman writer who has, for whatever reason, chosen to engage with and talk about Faulkner's work.

In 1977, speaking at the same conference in Oxford, Mississippi which Toni Morrison would address just eight years later, Margaret Walker Alexander delivered a back-handed compliment to the writer whose work the conference celebrates:

> Faulkner was, in fact, a racist--but two or three

> things are important to note. First of all, he knew that and he knew it thirty-five or forty years before anyone much talked in such terms. Secondly . . . he knew that the whole of American society . . . was racist. Thirdly, he moved beyond where many people are today to discover that in an important way, to say one is a racist is to say one is human and the product of his culture. And, fourthly . . . he did not conclude that this realization . . . removed any of the guilt and responsibility from the perceiver. For Faulkner devoted a good share of his work, his ability, to the problem of coming to terms with his racism (in a social context). (107-8)

Alexander concludes her analysis of racist portrayals in Faulkner, an analysis almost as scathing in places as that of critic Gloria Hull,[1] by admitting that at least she could respond to Faulkner when, "by the same token much of American literature did not move me at all. If the South seemed obsessed by race at least it was a subject" (121). While on the one hand seeming to damn Faulkner with faint praise, Alexander also implies that he projected in his fiction a world that demands the attention, if not always the approval, of critics interested in the question of race in **America:**

> He is the only white American whose use of race

> and religion in literature can be said to plumb the depths of myth which, of course, is the subdued of both religion and literature. (105)

In spite of her reservations about specific portrayals of African-Americans in Faulkner's work, Alexander's concession is to the comprehensiveness of Faulkner's fictional world which, like the one he occupied, is populated not just by whites, but, albeit mostly peripherally in the fiction, by African-Americans and Native Americans as well.

In his 1987 article "Minstrel Nightmares: Black Dreams of Faulkner's Dreams of Blacks," Craig Werner attempts to explain why African-American writers/critics such as Margaret Walker Alexander continue to grapple with Faulkner's legacy when, admittedly, "Faulkner fails to excavate Afro-American history as thoroughly as he excavates Euro-American male history" (37). Werner notes two stages in "Afro-American response to Faulkner": one of "correction" and castigation, and a later stage in which "Afro-American writers both draw on Faulkner for insight into their own cultural situation and contribute important insights into the excavation which he began" (37). Arguing that "[E]ven when he fails to comprehend fully the nature of Afro-American signifying . . . Faulkner provides images capable of deconstructing the binary oppositions on which racial privilege depends" (40), Werner extends the implications of this thesis to a consideration of the inter-

textual engagement between the texts of African-American writers and those of Faulkner. He cites Morrison, among others, as a writer who, because she understands that "[Faulkner's] work is grounded in social, specifically racial, realities" (53), "continue[s] to find him worth arguing with" (35).

Indeed, the profound ambivalence which Alexander and later Morrison have evinced in their critical responses to Faulkner invites us to explore and speculate on the possibility of an intertextual relationship which translates the deeply personal, but static and conservative, filial love story of Bloomean poetics into a "dynamics of desire" (Wynter 242) that oscillates not only between individual authors and texts, but within a larger social field, and in which what is at stake is precisely the issue of representation, both in its intensely personal and its inevitably public and social aspects. As Werner points out, one site where this theme is explicitly played out is in the minstrel show, whose dynamic, since it depends upon the building "of one representation upon previous representations" ("Minstrel" 46) is potentially revisionary. Moreover, minstrelsy

> subverts its own meaning by deconstructing the binary opposition on which its hierarchical structures depend, creating a form of expression which demands confrontation with an infinitely

> extensive/regressive chain of signifiers. Which is to say: white minstrelsy deconstructs itself." ("The Framing" 345)

What is particularly refreshing about Werner's article is precisely the way that he grounds his argument in a social and political, rather than a biological, paradigm, that of the minstrel show. Emphasising the parodic and transgressive conventions of minstrelsy, he suggests that

> Blacks and whites can move closer to mutual understanding by approximating versions of one another. Faulkner imitates blacks in his fiction; black writers imitate Faulkner's forms. Each broadens his/her knowledge and communicates, if obliquely, to his/her audience, creating a more synthetic base for the next act of the minstrel show. ("Minstrel" 39)

And just as the minstrel show itself depends for its effect on an implicit and mutual cultural code,

> The dialogue between Faulkner and Afro-American culture involves several levels of distortion and rectification grounded as much in the wider cultural context as in the context of a particular work or works. (39)

It is important to recognize, in this regard, that the alleged "argument" of the African-American writer is as much an argument with "the wider cultural context" as it is an

argument with Faulkner, as much an argument with a racist patriarchy as it is with a racist patriarchal figure.

While, as we shall see, minstrelsy per se can account only partially for the intertextual dynamic between the texts of Morrison and Faulkner, it is important to note the contributions that it can make. As I have suggested, the idea of minstrelsy expands the notion of intersubjectivity beyond the personal to the consciously social and political, confirming the uneasy co-existence of experiential and epistemological paradigms that characterizes the ideologically-(in)formed individual. Therefore, just as we can speculate that Faulkner's rendering of characters--both white and non-white--in his fiction relies as much on personal observation and perception of people as it does on previous cultural representations, we can infer that Morrison's representations are likewise eclectically informed, and that even while her identity as an African-American woman undeniably informs her political and social views, her portrayals of African-Americans may build as much upon Faulkner's as they do upon, for example, Hurston's. In view of Morrison's claim, cited earlier, that her work is somehow evocative of black women's texts that she had not even read, we may even speculate that, for example, Hurston's influence reached Morrison indirectly through the work of white writers who had appropriated Hurston's style. The potential for such infinite regression is clearly characteristic of the parodic

nature of the minstrel show.

Parody, particularly as it has been revived by recent attention to minstrelsy and as it has been redefined by theorists such as Linda Hutcheon, may in fact be a useful concept to employ in a discussion of the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison.[2] But there are, I feel, two important obstacles to the use of either parody or minstrelsy as a means of accounting for that relationship. The first pertains to the concept of parody as it is inextricably and perhaps inevitably linked to notions of conscious intent to imitate and subvert:

> when we speak of parody, we do not just mean two texts that interrelate in a certain way. We also imply an intention to parody another work (or set of conventions) and both a recognition of that intent and an ability to find and interpret the backgrounded text in its relation to the parody. (Hutcheon, A Theory 22)

While I do not deny that there are parodic moments in Morrison's work (one such being the obvious parody of the standard North American primer in the opening pages of The Bluest Eye), I think that attempting to describe specific passages in Morrison's work as consciously ironic inversions of situations found in Faulkner amounts to little more than an exercise in source-hunting which would be, as such, subject to attendant empirical questions and doubts. While my

study will adduce and analyze referential points of contiguity between texts, I will not insist upon a "necessary" (Riffaterre, "Intertextual Unconscious") or dependent connection between such points, but will rather exploit them for their potential to open up a dialogue between the two writers.

But while it is difficult to employ the term parody vis-à-vis intertextuality without raising questions of influence and intention, it may be equally difficult and perhaps even objectionable to define intertextual relationships in terms of minstrelsy, as Werner proposes. Whereas parody flirts with telos--suggesting, as it does, determinate sources and intended effects--minstrelsy, in terms of what Werner admits is its inability to arrest the proliferation of "the chain of signifiers," is unable to account adequately for the unequal distribution of power in its performance. As my example from The Sound and the Fury above demonstrates, it does matter who is doing the impersonating, who can wipe the shoe polish from his face, if not the accent from his lips, and (re)join the dominant (white) society. Moreover, it does make a difference to the reception of the text that Faulkner was a white Southern male writing in a tradition of white American literature. There is, in other words, beyond the performance in and of the text, a clear and present danger in confusing the impersonator with the one being impersonated, as Faulkner

suggests in the warning of one of the boys: "Ain't you afraid he'll hit you?" So, although Susan Willis, like Werner, can claim that "blackface is heavily laden with overt racist and sexist messages," but "is hollowed of social meaning [making] blackface a site where the fear of miscegenation can be both expressed and managed, where misogyny can be affirmed and denied, and where race and gender can be stereotyped and transgressed" ("I Shop" 190), Berndt Ostendorf is careful to foreground the hegemonic paranoia that governs both the production and reception of the minstrel show:

> Minstrelsy anticipated on stage what many Americans deeply feared: the blackening of America. Minstrelsy did in fact create a symbolic language and a comic iconography for 'intermingling' culturally with the African Caliban while at the same time 'isolating' him socially. In blackening his face the white minstrel acculturated voluntarily to his 'comic' vision of blackness, thus anticipating in jest what he feared in earnest. . . . Minstrelsy is proof that negrophilia and negrophobia are not at all contradictory. Minstrelsy is negrophobia staged as negrophilia, or vice versa, depending on the respective weight of the fear or the attraction. (67, 81)

As a social practice dependent mainly on visual signification and broad aural parody, minstrelsy is anything but an even playing field upon which identities are exchanged and obscured: one has only to imagine the responses of a racially mixed audience to its performance, by either blacks or whites, to recognize that, for all the sophisticated theorization suggesting that minstrelsy "deconstructs itself," its signification will vary significantly according to the experiences of the individual as either a member of the oppressed (and parodied) group or as a member of hegemonic society. As a model for the inter-textual relationship between Morrison and Faulkner, minstrelsy may be incapable of accounting for differential power relationships without resorting finally to the love/hate dilemma posed by Bloom's psychological model of poetic influence.

While I claim that Morrison is ambivalent about Faulkner's legacy, and that this ambivalence characterizes both her critical and creative response to his work, it is not my intention merely to celebrate this ambivalence in my readings, as I think the trope of minstrelsy would have me do. The fact that both Morrison and Faulkner strategically use minstrelsy and/or parody in their work and even that they do so to suggest the constructed nature of race and gender does not necessarily imply that we, as their readers, are unable to discern the differential pressures put upon,

as well as investments in, their respective constructions of racial and gender identity. As Henry Louis Gates advises, we must learn to negotiate between "the imperatives of agency and the rhetoric of dismantlement" (Loose Canons 38). Nancy Harstock suggests that it is possible, without reverting to humanist claims of ontological identity, to answer such a demand by a consideration of how one's experience relative to the power structures of society produces what she calls an "epistemolog[y] of marked subjectivity" ("Postmodernism" 24). While Harstock rejects essentialist notions of identity, she argues that subjects do occupy specific socio-historical sites which inform their response to hegemonic society: she claims that "epistemologies of marked subjectivities do not see everything from nowhere but they do see some things from somewhere" (29). Gayatri Spivak refers to such positioning as a "strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" ("Introduction" 13). As a strategy essential to the process of speaking out about and alleviating oppression, this positioning is at most suggested by the concept of minstrelsy, but is, as I will later suggest, more fully theorized in the discourse of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

What Werner's concept of minstrelsy implies for an intertextual reading between works by Faulkner and Morrison, then, is simply the need to remain aware not only of the

very stark and apparent differences between the two writers--particularly differences of race and gender--but also to keep in mind the common socio-political-literary epistemology that Morrison and Faulkner share simply by virtue of their education and exposure to mainstream American culture. This parallactic gap between experiential or positional difference and epistemological coalescence, arguably endemic to the human condition, stretches very wide indeed for those, such as women or African-Americans, who have historically been denied a significant role in defining themselves. W.E.B. duBois described this unsettling effect as a sense of "double-consciousness":

> the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (364)

Such is the peculiar force of ideology, described in Althusserian terms as "not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which

they live" (qtd. in Belsey, "Constructing" 46), that it so effectively permeates and structures consciousness as to allow the most irreconcilable contradictions to exist within an individual.

Both a "descendant of Faulkner's nursemaid" by virtue of her racial background and intellectually an inheritor of Faulkner's cultural legacy by virtue of her education, Toni Morrison responds to Faulkner's work in an understandably complex, ambiguous, and ambivalent manner. Following her own address to the Yoknapatawpha conference, in response to the question--"What effect did Faulkner have on your literary career?"--Morrison echoes and elaborates upon Margaret Walker Alexander's praise of Faulkner's "courage" and "vision" in a passage from which I quote at length:

> I don't think that my response [to Faulkner] was any different from any other student at that time, inasmuch as there was in Faulkner this power and courage--the courage of a writer, a special kind of courage. My reasons, I think, for being interested and deeply moved by all his subjects had something to do with my desire to find out something about this country and that artistic articulation of its past that was not available in history, which is what art and fiction can do but sometimes history refuses to do. . . . But there was an articulate investigation of an era that one

> or two authors provided and Faulkner was certainly at the apex of that investigation. And there was something else about Faulkner which I can only call 'gaze.' He had a gaze that was different. It appeared, at that time, to be similar to a look, even a sort of staring, a refusal-to-look-away approach in his writing that I found admirable. ("Faulkner and Women" 296-7)

That Morrison uses much the same language to approve certain African-American women writers--"their look, their gaze of the text is unblinking and wide and very steady. It's not narrow, it's very probing and it does not flinch" (Interview by Davis 418)--suggests that Morrison no doubt intended this compliment as very high and sincere praise of Faulkner. But it is important to understand also the double-edged sword implied by Morrison's use of the word "gaze," a point that can be drawn not only historically, from the Duboisian "double-consciousness," but from Morrison's own scattered comments regarding the role of vision as it relates to the exigencies of being "black" in America.

First of all, the continued emphasis that Morrison places upon vision, both in her own work and in her critical commentary on other writers, has its roots in an awareness of the role that vision played in objectifying and therefore managing a slave population:

> The interest in vision, in seeing, is a fact of

> black life. As slaves and ex-slaves, black people were manageable and findable, as no other slave society would be, because they were black. So there is an enormous impact from the simple division of color--more than sex, age, or anything else. The complaint is not being seen for what one is. (LeClair and Morrison 376)

As Morrison implies above and later argues in her collection of critical essays, Playing in the Dark, the implications of such a ready visual distinction for the creative artist may be a tendency to employ a kind of shorthand as a means of portraying character per se and/or to resort lazily to the stereotyping, fetishization, sensational distortion, etc. of non-white racial characteristics. Moreover, for a very long time African-Americans, denied a cultural voice, were in no position to contest such literary misconceptions:

> One could write about them [African-Americans], but there was never the danger of their 'writing back.' Just as one could speak to them without fear of their 'talking back.' One could even observe them, hold them in prolonged gaze, without encountering the risk of being observed, viewed, or judged in return. (Morrison, "Unspeakable" 13)

But how is the "prolonged gaze" of the master any different from the "staring" look with which Morrison credits and even valorizes Faulkner?

In this context, it is interesting to note the increasingly confused and ambivalent tone in which Morrison continues her response to the question of Faulkner's influence:

> At that time, in the '50s or the '60s, it never crossed my mind to write books. But then I did it, and I was very surprised myself that I was doing it, and I knew that I was doing it for some reasons that are not writerly ones. I don't really find strong connections between my work and Faulkner's. In an extraordinary kind of memorable way there are literary watersheds in one's life. In mine, there are four or five, and I hope they are all ones that meet everybody's criteria of who should be read, but some of them don't. Some books are just awful in terms of technique, but nevertheless they are terrific: they are too good to be correct. With Faulkner there was always something to surface. Besides, he could infuriate you in such wonderful ways. It wasn't just complete delight--there was also that other quality that is just as important as devotion: outrage. The point is that with Faulkner one was never indifferent. ("Women and Faulkner" 297)

Morrison's impromptu response to a question which she might nonetheless have expected to encounter is understandably

fractured and ambiguous and therefore should not be compelled to bear the weight of too close an analysis. Several things are clear enough, however. One is that Morrison's praise of Faulkner as a writer is strongly tempered by her resistance to having her own writing identified with his. While she acknowledges that her response to what she was reading in the fifties and sixties (and this must have included Faulkner, as all of his novels published to that time were included in the bibliography of her 1955 Master's thesis) had something to do with her becoming a writer, she is vague about how this might have happened.

What I would like to put some pressure on for now, however, is Morrison's comment that some writers are "too good to be correct." I think we are safe in assuming that she is alluding here to Faulkner, among other writers, and that Faulkner's lack of "correctness," although it appears in context to refer to his "technique," also has something to do with the "outrage" that is one of Morrison's responses to Faulkner's work. Inspired by current notions of "political correctness," I would like to suggest that what Morrison was perhaps too polite to mention to her Yoknapatawpha audience is precisely the allegedly racist portrayals of African-Americans to which Margaret Alexander, on the same podium, referred eight years before. Faulkner's praiseworthy gaze, as unwavering and frank as both Morrison and Alexander acknowledge it to be, appears somehow not to

account for their experience of themselves as African-American women. As Morrison told Thomas LeClair, "[T]he complaint is not being seen for what one is" or, as she more clearly articulates in an interview with Christina Davis:

> in the beginning I was just interested in finally placing black women center stage in the text, and not as the all-knowing, infallible black matriarch but as a flawed here, triumphant there, mean, nice, complicated woman, and some of them win and some of them lose. I'm very interested in why and how that happens but here was this vacancy in the literature I had any familiarity with and the vacancy was me, or the women that I knew. (419)

Morrison does not mean to imply that what is lacking in such portrayals of African-American women is women precisely like herself--students, teachers, writers, professional women and mothers, etc.; in her own work, after all, women in such roles comprise only a minority of her characters. Yet somewhere between William Faulkner's "articulate investigation of an era" and Toni Morrison's experience of herself and others as African-American women, something had been lost, and, I think we can infer, that missing "something" or "vacancy" had a great deal to do with Toni Morrison's decision to become a creative writer. It is interesting, though, that Morrison chooses the word "vacancy" here rather than "absence," certainly not denying the presence of the

African-American woman in the literature that she read, but suggesting rather the flatness of the portrayals, the vacancy--or perhaps, echoing Hull echoing Faulkner, "vacuousness"--that she saw in the black faces that stared inarticulately out at her from the "white" page.

Such an interpretation is strengthened in Morrison's Playing in the Dark, in which she offers an explicit agenda for considering the representation of race in the work of white American writers. Arguing that even when an African-Americanist presence is not overtly thematized in American literature, "Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence" (17), Morrison tests her thesis with a reading of "race" in works by Edgar Allan Poe, Willa Cather, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway. Conspicuously absent from her study, except for the occasional allusion, is William Faulkner. Without speculating for now on the reasons for Morrison's omission of Faulkner from a study in which his work might surely have found an important place, I would like to suggest that Faulkner's work appears to occupy, for Morrison, a slightly different ideological terrain than that of, for example, Ernest Hemingway. Just prior to her scathing reading of racist signification in To Have and to Have Not, Morrison cites as her critical paradigm James Snead's (1986) "recipe" for "rhetorical racism" in

literature, but she appears to acquiesce to, if simply by noting, Snead's claim that "'Faulkner . . . counters these social figures with literary devices of his own'" (qtd. in Morrison Playing, 67). What qualities then, we might ask, does Toni Morrison perceive in Faulkner's work that mitigate, if not his racism (she is careful to distinguish the writer from his/her work), then the potentially racist portrayals in his texts? What qualities might she have perceived in his work that she has found valuable for her own exploration of race in fiction?

I have already discussed Morrison's praise of Faulkner's "gaze," yet I have also suggested the way that that gaze could be seen to represent the intrusive stare of the "master" who refuses to acknowledge the voice and subjectivity of the object of his gaze. But what distinguishes the work of Faulkner from, for example, that of Hemingway, is perhaps the southern writer's far more extensive and motivated engagement with racial issues. Consider what Morrison says of Hemingway's relevance to her study:

> My interest in Ernest Hemingway becomes heightened when I consider how much apart his work is from African-Americans. That is, he has no need, desire, or awareness of them either as readers of his work or as people existing anywhere other than in his imaginative (and imaginatively lived) world. (Playing 69)

By way of contrast, I would suggest that Faulkner's "need, desire, or awareness" of African-Americans, if not necessarily or intentionally as "readers of his work," certainly as "people existing," permeates his work in a way that arguably exceeds the merely emblematic qualities of skin color that render visible and manageable the political /economic/social demarcation between races. This is not to suggest that Faulkner's work is "color-blind" and therefore ideologically more palatable to Morrison than is that of Hemingway. Quite to the contrary, in Playing in the Dark Morrison denies such an overt censorial agenda:

> In no way do I mean investigation of what might be called racist or nonracist literature, and I take no position, nor do I encourage one, on the quality of a work based on the attitudes of an author or whatever representations are made of some group. (90)

Rather, Morrison praises once again the idea of the open, comprehensive gaze by arguing that "[A]ll of us, readers and writers, are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes" (91). In fact, she uses the word "gaze" explicitly when she defines her purpose in Playing in the Dark:

> My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and

imaginers; from the serving to the served. (90)

I want to suggest, then, that what is exceptional (and I mean the word in all of its senses) about Faulkner for Morrison is the way that his work, for all of its "incorrectness" vis-à-vis specific portrayals, examines and critiques racism per se through the subjection of both the author himself and his text to a potential auto-critique of the racism of southern culture: the way that Faulkner's texts appear, at certain times more successfully than at others, to "avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served." In other words, Morrison suggests an awareness on her part that Faulkner was aware of the process by which his gaze imagined the gaze of the other turned back upon himself. The example with which I opened this chapter suggests the possibility of just such an auto-critique.

To argue that the critical work of Toni Morrison and the fictional work of William Faulkner share a common purpose or effect is to make, I think, an extraordinary claim, one which will require further substantiation. But more than that, I would like to suggest that the intertextual engagement I will explore here between Morrison's creative work--particularly The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, and Beloved--and Faulkner's already constitutes a profound and creative enactment of Morrison's overtly critical

response to the portrayal of blackness and particularly of black women in American canonical works. The apparent contradiction between these two claims--one for identity, one for difference--perhaps sheds some light on the fact that Morrison's novels, although they deal almost exclusively with African-American communities and characters, and are set primarily in the north rather than the south, continue to inspire vague comparisons to those of Faulkner. In fact, such contradictions appear irreconcilable only if we remain fixated upon falsely dichotomous models which require "the assumption that women writers either imitate their male predecessors or revise them and that this simple dualism is adequate to describe the influences on the woman's text" (Showalter, "Feminist Criticism" 265). Instead, it should be clear by now that Morrison's acknowledgement of herself as a (however reluctant) student of Faulkner and her frequent use of the words "imagine," "gaze," and "desire," place at least her literary criticism in an intertextual economy with the language of (post-structural) psychoanalysis, and particularly with the work of Jacques Lacan.

I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you--the objet petit a--I mutilate you. (Four 263)

Rather than a return to a Bloomean psychodynamics, the interjection of Lacanian theory allows us to move beyond, if not the Oedipal drama, at least the insular bourgeois family upon which, admittedly, Freud constructed the earliest psychoanalytic principles. Lacan's avowed "return to Freud" charts a route through Hegel and Saussure that scrupulously detours the Freud who inspired American ego psychology and therefore the Bloomean model in which "strong" sons compete with their fathers and grandfathers for dominance of the poetic scene. I want to suggest that Lacan's ideas allow us to enlarge the landscape upon which this scene is played out and to theorize beyond relationships and diagnosed neuroses within the family to the psychoanalytic encounter itself which, in a very pertinent sense, is always already inter-textual, as intertextuality has been defined as a "dialectic reduplication involv[ing] a translation from one mode into another, for instance from theory into practice or from life into text" (Rajan 72). In other words, since we cannot, either in good conscience or without distorting the meaning of the term "family" beyond recognition, suggest that the relationship of Toni Morrison to William Faulkner is a filial one, what is to prevent us from translating or transferring the dynamics of filiation into another sphere, that of the verbal encounter between complete strangers who

are nonetheless uncannily compelled to act out the family drama?

It was Freud himself who suggested the uncanniness of the psychoanalytic encounter and, since I believe that the "uncanny" is important to an understanding of Morrison's response to Faulkner, I want to approach Lacan and the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter through my own return to Freud's essay, "The Uncanny." In this essay Freud describes the illusionary/disillusionary moment of encounter with a representation--either a reflection or a construction--of "self" that is recognizable, but not immediately corroborated by one's own sense of who one is. One of Freud's examples, drawn from his own experience on a train late at night during which he encountered and misrecognized his distorted reflection in a pane of glass, is particularly relevant to Morrison's response to the portrayal of African-American women in literature. Anticipating duBois and Morrison, and, of course, Lacan, Freud builds on this unsettling experience to suggest that the uncanny manifests itself most commonly in literature in the "doppelgänger," which relies for its effectiveness on precisely a sense of "double consciousness":

> The fact that an agency of this kind exists, which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object--the fact, that is, that man is capable of self-observation--renders it possible to invest

> the old idea of a 'double' with a new meaning and to ascribe a numbe. of things to it--above all, those things which seem to self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of earliest times. ("The 'Uncanny'" 235)

Although not explicitly, Freud implies both in his personal example and in its application to literature, the split subject of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory: one who is infrequently, and then only dizzily, allowed to glimpse the alienated, constructed nature of her own identity. Such is the response of Morrison to the African-American women she encounters in literature: the "vacancy" she describes is precisely the point of non-coincidence between the distorted representation of the African-American woman (a representation that must, ironically, be to some extent recognizable in order to be misrecognized) and her own sense of what it is to <u>be</u> an African-American woman: "[T]he complaint is not being seen for what one is."

In "The Uncanny," Freud anticipates Morrison's complaint when he discusses the limits of "creative" writing:

> The imaginative writer has this licence among many others, that he can select his world of representation so that it either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in what particulars he pleases. We accept his ruling in every case. . . . The situation is

> altered as soon as the writer pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he accepts as well all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and everything that would have an uncanny effect in reality has it in his story. But in this case he can even increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality, by bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact. In doing this he is in a sense betraying us to the superstitiousness which we have ostensibly surmounted; he deceives us by promising to give us the sober truth, and then after all overstepping it. We react to his inventions as we would have reacted to real experiences; by the time we have seen through his trick it is already too late and the author has achieved his object. But it must be added that his success is not unalloyed. We retain a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit. (249-51)

Given our current understanding of the relative and constructed nature of "reality," it is not difficult to extend Freud's analysis to the contemporary African-American reader's response to an otherwise "realistic" fictional world which nonetheless contains "non-realistic" portrayals of African-Americans. We have seen, in the examples of

Alice Walker and Gloria Hull, just such feelings of "dissatisfaction" and "a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit." But in order to contextualize Morrison's response to Faulkner, we have to shift the theory of the uncanny onto the plane of the analytic encounter itself, a move which will be more fully theorized in Lacan but that is already anticipated by Freud in "The Uncanny."

Late in this essay Freud almost sheepishly describes yet another, perhaps more troubling, encounter with the uncanny when the mother of one of his patients attributes to witchcraft the cure Freud has effected: Freud admits that "I should not be surprised to hear that psychoanalysis, which is concerned with laying bare . . . hidden forces, has itself become uncanny to many people" ("The 'Uncanny'" 243). The "uncanny" erupts in the psychoanalytic encounter in the work of bringing repressed feelings and thoughts to "light," as Freud suggests in the following passage:

> if psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which <u>recurs</u>. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of

> indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some other affect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended das Heimliche ['homely'] into its opposite, das Unheimliche . . .; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition . . . of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light. (241)

Freud is describing nothing less than the work of analysis itself through the uncanny mechanism by which the patient "re-experienc[es] emotional relations which had their origin in his earliest object-attachments during the repressed period of his life" (Freud in Gay 26), the mechanism that Freud labelled the "transference."

I want to suggest the way that the psychoanalytic encounter and, in particular, the notion of the transference which Freud thought to be the essential tool of analysis, begin to provide a vocabulary with which to speak not just about textuality, as critics of both Morrison and Faulkner

have pointed out, but about the intertextual relationship between the two authors. First, we must go to Freud for a definition of the term:

> In every analytic treatment there arises, without the physician's agency, an intense emotional relationship between the patient and the analyst which is not to be accounted for by the actual situation [emphasis added]. It can be of a positive or of a negative character and can vary between the extremes of a passionate, completely sensual love and the unbridled expression of an embittered defiance and hatred. This transference--to give it its short name--soon replaces in the patient's mind the desire to be cured, and, so long as it is affectionate and moderate, becomes the agent of the physician's influence and neither more nor less than the mainspring of the joint work of analysis. Later on, when it has become passionate or has been converted into hostility, it becomes the principal tool of the resistance. It may then happen hat it will paralyse the patient's powers of associating and endanger the success of the treatment. Yet it would be senseless to evade it; for an analysis **without transference is an impossibility. . . .** (in Gay 26)

Freud goes on to argue that, like the uncanny, the transference is not restricted just to the psychoanalytic encounter:

> It must not be supposed . . . that transference is created by analysis and does not occur apart from it. Transference is merely uncovered and isolated by analysis. It is a universal phenomenon of the human mind, it decides the success of all medical influence, and in fact dominates the whole of each person's relations to his human environment. We can easily recognize it as the same dynamic factor which the hypnotists have named 'suggestibility,' which is the agent of hypnotic rapport and whose incalculable behaviour led to difficulties with the cathartic method as well. When there is no inclination to a transference of emotion such as this, or when it has become entirely negative . . . then there is also no possibility of influencing the patient by psychological means. (in Gay 26)

While Freud's use of the word "influence" suggests the possibility of an application of the idea of the transference to the study of the relationship between writers, it also once again raises Bloomean notions of intention and teleology from which I have tried to distance my own approach. However, it is important to note that Freud,

equating "transference" with the idea of "suggestibility" evoked in hypnosis (the clinical methodology which he rejected), viewed the transference not as an end in itself, but as an instrument which "is not allowed to play the decisive part in determining the therapeutic results": "It is used instead to induce the patient to perform a piece of psychical work--the overcoming of his transference-resistances--which involves a permanent alteration in his mental economy [emphasis added]" (in Gay 26). While Freud seems almost to equate "influence" with the transference, and particularly with transference-love, he nowhere claims that the desired result of therapy--the "cure"--is the analyst's influence over the analysand. In fact, Freud's institution of the classic position taken up in the psychiatric encounter--the analyst situated behind the analysand--is precisely intended to mitigate the effects of the transference by effacing the gaze associated with hypnosis and suggestibility. So in spite of Freud's ambivalence about the transference in analysis, three ideas are evident: 1) the transference is the necessary precondition for successful analysis and perhaps even for all intersubjective relationships ("It is a universal phenomenon of the human mind, it decides the success of all medical influence, and in fact dominates the whole of each person's relations to his human environment"; "an analysis without transference is an impossibility"); 2) the transference

functions (when it does not "paralyse the patient's powers of associating and endanger the success of the treatment") as "the mainspring of the joint work of analysis" and, in its passionate and hostile manifestations, "becomes the principal tool of the resistance"; 3) the therapeutic result of psychoanalysis is "the [patient's] overcoming of the transference-resistances."

However much Freud may have undertheorized the transference, and, as has been suggested by some of his critics, however blind he may have been to the nature of his own relationships (counter-transferences) with some of his patients, he indicated that the satisfactory result of therapy is an "overcoming" achieved through the "perform[ance] of a piece of psychical work" during which the patient is "led through the primal period of her [sic] mental development . . . to acquire the extra piece of mental freedom which distinguishes conscious mental activity--in the systematic sense--from unconscious" (in Gay 386): what Freud had previously referred to as "a permanent alteration in his [sic] mental economy" (in Gay 26). So while specularity, identification, and influence play a large and even determining role in the successful operation of the analysis, they are effects not to be confused with its outcome. Moreover, while Freud does not directly address this issue, it should be clear that the analyst herself does not escape the effects of the transference, a

possibility which, as it sets in motion a dialectic between the analyst and the analysand, begs the question of the stability of the analyst's own identity.

It is at this point, I think, that Lacan departs from, or at least further elaborates, the Freudian notion of the transference that has inspired ego-psychology and, not coincidentally, Harold Bloom's theory of poetic influence which, even if we were to try to map it on the psychoanalytic encounter, would fail to account fully for the dynamics of the transference. Working within an American psychoanalytic model which posits as its aim the strengthening of the analysand's ego through identification with the analyst's own, already strong ego, Bloom acknowledges paternal mastery in his tendency to consider inter-poetic relationships in terms of a poet's over-identification with an "indubitable" or strong precursor and the subsequent and necessary "misreading" or symbolic murder of the father-figure which results in the neophyte poet's creative autonomy. While Bloom suggests that such a process results in "a permanent alteration in [the poet's] mental economy," ultimately the status of the strong precursor is only strengthened and we are left to wonder if anything has indeed changed, or if indeed the poet has only come "full circle," as Bloom says he "appears" to have done. Indeed, Bloom's notion of the evolution of "strong poets" through their "misreading" or "misprision" of a father-poet is more

closely allied with the Lacanian idea of "méconnaisance," a function of the Imaginary register, rather than of the symbolic. According to Lacanian theory, the role of psychoanalytic work, and specifically the transference, is precisely to move the patient beyond such Imaginary identification. Catherine Clément alludes to the stagnation of American ego psychology, which I see clearly represented in Bloom's work, in very graphic terms:

> To respond to the patient's demand and create a sturdy ego by means of identification--here we get a good whiff of Oedipus. A strong smell of cabbage stew, the family, and incest, these being precisely the images that need to be distanced. (139)

It is little wonder, then, that the Bloomean model has difficulty accounting for textual relationships outside the white European canon. Bloom's model, moreover, in retaining the idea of the dead author as a strong, self-authorizing figure, is unable to exploit the dynamic work of analysis, in which the analyst plays a very different role than does the Bloomean precursor. What is missing from Bloom's model, then, is precisely what is missing from Freud's theory of the transference: the desire of the analyst.

The advantage to theorizing intertextuality in terms of the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter and Lacan's notion of transference, as opposed to those of Freud, is that Lacan's

work is informed by post-Saussurean linguistic theories which enable him to emphasize the discursively constructed subject in a manner which Freud could not.[3] In addition, Lacan has re-inscribed Freudian theory in a post-humanist, post-Hegelian context which allows him to extend the implications of Freud's "discovery" of the unconscious to a theory of the subject as irrevocably split and inevitably and terminally alienated from the objects of his desire. Lacan, I think, re-represents Freud's notion of the "uncanny" relationship between one's sense of self and one's distorted image in a pane of glass in the child's initial discovery of a mirrored self which, while it belies her sense of her own "incapacity" (Écrits 2), suggests an idealized, but ultimately unrealizable, image of the body. Lacan argues that this form, "the Ideal-I,"

> situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination [emphasis added], in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual alone, or rather, which will only rejoin the coming-into-being . . . of the subject asymptomatically, whatever the success of the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve as I his discordance with his own reality. (Écrits 2)

Further, Lacan suggests that the pre-Oedipal split in the subject instituted by the child's discovery in the mirror

stage will govern all future intersubjective relations (including the Oedipal one):

> This moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the imago of the counterpart and the drama of primordial jealousy . . ., the dialectic that will henceforth link the I to socially elaborated situations.
>
> It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger, even though it should correspond to a natural maturation--the very normalization of this maturation being henceforth dependent, in man, on a cultural mediation as exemplified, in the case of the sexual object, by the Oedipus complex. (Écrits 5-6)

"Méconnaissance" or misrecognition, according to Lacan, is a primary ego function (Écrits 6), not, as Bloom would have it, a symbolic defence that promotes the strengthening of the ego and therefore autonomy: in other words, both the ego and autonomy are always already specular effects, effects of what Lacan terms the Imaginary, not of the

Symbolic, register:

> Lacan argues that this relation of the ego to the other is "an essential structure of the human condition" . . ., but he also says that the fundamental function of this ego is a méconnaissance that obscures the alienation inherent in imaginary relations. (Clark 23)[4]

The emotions of both love and hate, then, as well as their vacillation in ambivalence, are expressions of the narcissism of the ego informed by méconnaissance.

Lacan's retheorization of the ego has obvious implications for the practice of psychoanalysis, as Benvenuto and Kennedy point out: "[Lacan] was particularly concerned with the status of knowledge with which the psychoanalyst deals, and for him, psychoanalysis is based on a fundamental split between the subject and the knowledge he has of himself" (18). And Lacan, in characteristically aphoristic manner, makes it clear that analysts themselves are not exempt from this fundamental split: "What nobility of soul we display when we reveal that we ourselves are made of the same clay as those we mold" (Écrits [226]). For this reason, Lacan can suggest that this analyst-with-feet-of-clay engages in interpretation, but only for the purpose of moving the analysis along: the analyst's interpretations are never correct, but their very "wrongness" compels the analysand to reclaim responsibility for his/her meaning.

The orientation of the analysis, then, is not toward a "cure" in which the subject could be restored to a true knowledge of self or self-identity through an identification with the healthy ego of the psychoanalyst, but toward another kind of knowledge, or what Lacan opposes to Cartesian knowledge, truth: the analysand's awareness of the Imaginary basis for intersubjective relationships, an awareness which will lead the analysand beyond the identification of the transference to an awareness of his alienation, insofar as Lacan describes alienation as "the operation which marks the field of the Other with the same finitude that marks the subject himself, the finitude that defines in the subject the fact of dependence on the effects of the signifier" (Clark 87).[5]

Lacan begins his discussion of analytic praxis by elaborating on Freud's idea of the relation between transference and suggestion but, more clearly than Freud, positing a "beyond" to identification and influence:

> Whether it intends to frustrate or to gratify, any reply to demand in analysis brings the transference back to suggestion.
>
> Between the transference and suggestion, there is, as Freud discovered, a relation. The fact is that the transference is also a suggestion, but one that can operate only on the basis of the demand for love, which is not a demand arising

> from any need. That this demand is constituted only in so far as the subject is the subject of the signifier is what allows it to be misused by reducing it to the needs from which these signifiers have been borrowed--which is what psychoanalysts, as we know, never fail to do.
>
> But identification with the all-powerful signifier of demand . . . must not be confused with identification with the object of the demand for love. This demand for love is also a regression, as Freud insists, when it produces the second mode of identification. . . . But it is another kind of regression.
>
> There is the exit that enables one to emerge from suggestion. Identification with the object as regression, because it sets out from the demand for love, opens up the sequence of the transference (opens up, not closes it), that is to say, the way by which the identifications that, in blocking this regression, punctuate it, can be denounced. (Écrits 270)

In this very difficult passage, Lacan charts the deceptive function of transference-love (as all love, he says is a "specular mirage," and therefore "essentially deceptive" (Four 268)), but not to dismiss the transference as merely an "identification"; in fact, Lacan argues that "the

transference is not the enactment . . . of the illusion that seems to drives us to [the] alienating identification that any conformity constitutes," but rather it is "the enactment of the reality of the unconscious" (Four 146). As such, the transference, as the phenomenon which, in effect, shuts off the unconscious, is precisely not only that which must be analyzed, but the only phenomenon in analysis that can be analyzed. Love plays a role in the analysis, but only insofar as its demands are not met and its objects are seen to be alienated from the drive, and insofar as it impels in the analysand recognition of his/her desire:

> it is at the level of analysis . . . that the nodal point by which the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality must be revealed. This nodal point is called desire, and the theoretical elaboration that I have pursued in recent years will show you, through each stage of clinical experience, how desire is situated in dependence on demand--which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition both, absolute and unapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued (méconnu), an element that is called desire. (Four 154)

Yet, in Lacanian terms, "desire is not sexual; rather it is

a relation of being to lack, a "lack of being by which being exists" (Clark 38).[6] Lacan later argues that "interpretation is directed towards desire, with which, in a certain sense, it is identical" (Four 176).

Claiming that the analyst is merely "the man to whom one speaks and to whom one speaks freely" (Écrits 253), Lacan explains how the analyst intervenes to help the analysand recognize his/her desire:

> the analyst gives his presence, but I believe that this presence is first of all simply the implication of his listening, and that this listening is simply the condition of speech. Furthermore why does the technique require that he should be so discreet if, in fact, this is not the case? It is only later that his presence will be felt.
>
> Anyway, the most acute feeling of his presence is bound up with a moment when the subject can only remain silent, that is to say, when he even recoils before the shadow of demand.
>
> Thus the analyst is he who supports the demand, not, as has been said, to frustrate the subject, but in order to allow the signifiers in which his frustration is bound up to reappear. (Écrits 255)

While Lacan has been seen as privileging speech, we must pay careful attention to his emphasis here on listening, or on "making oneself heard," as he explains:

> In the field of the unconscious, the ears are the only orifice that cannot be closed. Whereas making oneself seen is indicated by an arrow that really comes back towards the subject, making oneself heard goes toward the other. (Four 195)

While both the "voice" and the "gaze" are, for Lacan, sites of potential fetishization and Imaginary construction, speech and its apprehension are privileged in the analytic encounter, as Lacan argues that, in "the relations of desire to language . . . Freud discovered the unconscious" (Four 12). Thus we have Lacan's famous pronouncement: "the unconscious is structured like a language."

Just as for Freud, then, the transference for Lacan is the mainspring of the analysis: it is the necessary precondition for analysis; it is the principal tool of the resistance; and, insofar as "transference is always a matter of the "stagnation of the dialectic" (qtd. in Hogan and Pandit, "Introduction" xviii), the desired therapeutic result is the successful dissolution or overcoming of the transference-resistance by the analysand, keeping in mind Freud's definition of the transference-resistance not just as its hostile manifestation, but as that other narcissistic passion--love--as well. How, then, does Lacan's theory of transference and its treatment in analysis differ from that of Freud in a way that makes it desirable for me to adopt it as a model for the intertextual relationship

between Faulkner and Morrison?

First, by situating the alienation of the subject from her own desire in the mirror stage, rather than at the later Oedipal stage which marks her entry into the symbolic, Lacan suggests an intra-subjective non-identity that precedes and therefore maps all subsequent inter-subjective relationships. Therefore, while gender will inevitably and indisputably play a role in the psycho-maturation of the subject, alienation is seen to precede the discovery of gender difference and therefore to govern the intersubjective relations of both male and female subjects. With his view of the ego as an Imaginary construction which acts as a defense mechanism against the subject's recognition of an internal non-correspondence, Lacan can re-write the Oedipal drama in terms of a "fantasy of castration" in which "the castration anxiety endemic to the Oedipal complex derives from the earlier separation complex and represents the narcissistic ego's defense against threats to its imaginary coherence" (Clark 129-30).[7] Oedipus, then, is a "necessary myth that gives form to the operations of structure [emphasis added]" (Clark 16),[8] including the structure of the analytic situation:

> Functioning as a signifier, the phallus disrupts the imaginary union of the subject with the object and institutes the symbolic order in human experience. The result is a sense of "privation," of

> the "lack of the object," and this constitutes the essential point of analytic experience and forms its point of departure. This moment is experienced as "castration" in the imaginary; "privation" in the symbolic; and "frustration" in the real (p. 428).
>
> As a result of this lack, Lacan claims that the real can never be comprised within the analyst's experience but always exists at its limit. He says that we radically misunderstand analysis if we seek some ultimate reality beyond that which is structured by the signifier. (Clark 51)

It hardly bears repeating that Lacan means by the term "phallus" not the biological organ, but rather the irreducible "signifier" (Écrits 285) of patriarchal society. Lacan, well aware of the origins of his and Freud's model in the European or "conjugal" family, similarly substitutes the "name of the father"--"the signifier that marks the intervention of the "law" within the bond of mother and child" (Clark 42)--for the actual biological father of Freud's model. In patriarchal societies, the father's function is social, rather than strictly biological:

> the Father may be regarded as the original representative of the law . . . sustained beyond the subject who is actually led to occupy the place of the Other, namely, the Mother. (Écrits 311)

Moreover, Lacan interprets Freud as suggesting that "the Legislator (he who claims to lay down the Law) presents himself to fill the gap . . . as an imposter" (Écrits 311). In answer to Freud's question, "What is a Father," Lacan and Freud both (at least according to Lacan) reply that he "is the dead Father" (Écrits 310).[10]

In his essay "Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire," Lacan continues to forge a link between symbolic accession vis-à-vis the paternal role in the Oedipus complex and orientation toward the Real in terms of the psychoanalytic encounter. Lacan proposes that the "praxis that we call psychoanalysis is constituted by a structure" (Écrits 292): this structure, he goes on to elaborate and graph, reveals through the Oedipus complex the mapping of the location of desire (the potentially infinite excess of demand over need) in the desire of the Other, and the significance of accession to the Law (castration) as a means of checking the Other's omnipotence, thereby foreclosing for the subject the possibility of a primordial unity, and allowing the subject to recognize his/her desire. Lacan theorizes the omnipotence of the Other in terms of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, but adds that:

> The Other as previous site of the pure subject of the signifier holds the master position before coming into existence, to use Hegel's term against him, as an absolute Master. For what is omitted

> in the platitude of modern information theory is the fact that one can speak of code only if it is already the code of the Other, and that is something quite different from what is in question in the message, since it is from this code that the subject is constituted, which means that it is from the Other that the subject receives even the message that he emits. (Écrits 305, emphasis added)[11]

Lacan makes clear that the "Other . . . is never the real and living subject but rather a quasi-anonymous, symbolic place . . . that is the storehouse of received ideas" (Clark 54). It is with this in mind that we can conceive of the position of the analyst (in an always already intertextual economy) as similar, but not identical, to the position of the father. The analogy can be traced through the distinction that Lacan makes between the father qua imposter and the paternal function: it is in just such a manner that Lacan insists on the ignorance of the analyst in his role as the sujet supposé savoir. What is it that the analyst knows? Nothing, Lacan suggests, except signification: "The 'subject supposed to know' is . . . produced by the analysand's speech" (Clark 193). However, when Lacan says that "[As] soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere . . . there is transference" (Four 235), he also insists that the investment of the analysand in the

illusion of the analyst's omniscience is a necessary precondition both for analysis and for the analysand's resistance, the "impasse" between the analyst and the analysand:

> Lacan rejects transference both as the basis for rectifying the patient's relation to reality and as an arena in which the patient's ego can or should be strengthened. Instead, he describes transference in relation to the more general repetitive function of the "missed encounter" ("du même ratage"), a "temporal pulsation in which the unconscious closes up like a shutter . . ." [Four 143, 131]. This closure is effected by the ego [131] or by the objet a [145], and it constitutes both an obstacle to remembering [145] and the initial moment at which interpretation achieves its full force [131]. Born of the subject's relation to the signifier, transference situates the subject in the position of error vis-à-vis his discourse. This position usually results in the lying and misleading speech through which the analyst must identify the true subject that is constituted as secondary in relation to the signifier [138-42]. (Clark 79)

So how does the analyst, or the analysand, get beyond the transference? To answer this question, Lacan extends his idea that the father is always "the dead Father," to

suggest that the analyst occupies, in his silence, the place of death which represents the subject's reality (Clark 157):

> the analyst intervenes concretely in the dialectic of psychoanalysis by pretending he is dead, by cadaverizing his position as the Chinese say, either by his silence when he is the Other . . . or by annulling his own resistance when he is the other. . . . In either case, and under the respective effects of the symbolic and the imaginary, he makes death present. (Écrits 140)

Lacan indicates, however, that the silence of the analyst "must be situated in the place of a response. . . . It is a silence that calls forth" (Clark 157).[12] The Lacanian analyst, then, works through silence and detachment, or "the clear alienation that leaves to the subject the favour of stumbling upon the question of his essence" (Écrits 312), both to create and to refuse the analysand's transferential demands, particularly the demand for love. In other words, the analyst must play the role of the subject-supposed-to-know while at the same time refusing to be it for the analysand. Only by doing so can the analyst permit the analysand to discover that her speech is directed not to the analysand as other, but to herself as Other. Ultimately, this involves her in the "perception of the fault ("la faille," failing, bankruptcy) of the sujet supposé savoir" (Clark 91).[13] Lacan describes this process of the analy-

sand's discovery:

> the question <u>of</u> the Other, which comes back to the subject from the place from which he expects an oracular reply in some such form as . . . 'What do you want?', is the one that best leads him to the path of his own desire--providing he sets out, with the help of the skills of a partner known as a psychoanalyst, to reformulate it, even without knowing it, as 'What does he [the analyst] want of me?' (<u>Écrits</u> 312)

Michael Clark further elaborates Lacan's description of this process:

> In his effort to satisfy that desire, which Lacan describes as 'the desire for the desire of the Other,' the analysand proceeds through several steps. He first perceives the analyst as the subject supposed to know. He identifies with that subject as his Imaginary other. He then realizes that that subject does not know what the analysand originally supposed him to know, and in fact that the analyst wants to know what the analysand wants to know. At that moment, Lacan concludes, 'ce savoir supposé, il l'est devenu'; the analysand has become the knowledge he supposed belonged to the analyst. (Clark 194)[14]

The final event which Clark describes marks, for Lacan, the

moment at which the analyst in training becomes an analysand (what Lacan calls "la passe"), but, in a more general sense, it also describes the desirable outcome of any analysis. Elsewhere, Lacan explains that analysis must aim for

> the passage of a true speech, which joins the subject to an other subject (rather than an objectified other), on the other side of the wall of language. It is the ultimate relation [la relation dernière] of the subject to a true Other, to the Other who gives a response that one does not expect, which defines the terminal point of analysis. (qtd. in Clark 36)[15]

Clearly opposed to the goals of American ego psychology, Lacan's idea of a "cure" involves a radical differentiation from, rather than identity with, the analyst: "The analyst's desire is not a pure desire. It is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a desire which intervenes when, confronted with the primary signifier, the subject is, for the first time, in a position to subject himself to it. There only may the signification of a limitless love emerge, because it is outside the limits of the law, where alone it may live" (Lacan, Four 276). Note that in this formulation, which posits a beyond to Imaginary identification, the analysand's difference in relation to the analyst is closer to what we might term indifference in that it is devoid of the passionate involvement characteristic of the Imaginary

register. So while the "subject-supposed-to-know" is abandoned as an object of transference-love, the knowledge produced in the analysis continues to inform the subject, the former analysand who is, paradoxically, prepared to take up the position formerly held by the analyst. Lacan's articulation of the "cure" or "the pass," as we can see, involves a negative dialectic, the synthesis of which is not the subject's "happiness" or "adjustment," but the knowledge of her abjection: the end of analysis can only be the confrontation of "the one who undergoes it with the reality of the human condition": "the domain and the level of the experience of absolute disarray," a region which "touches the end of what [a man] is and what he is not" (Seminar VII 304).

Needless to say, Lacan's view of the transference and its resolution in the analytic situation takes us a considerable distance from the fairy-tale ending of the Bloomean psycho-dynamic model of poetic influence. Bloom is not alone, however, in his failure to theorize beyond the transference in his model of intertextuality. In the quotation below, Jonathan Culler, clearly influenced by Lacanian psychoanalytic notions in his attempt to equate intertextuality with psychoanalysis, must yet resort to a kind of mysticism in his effort to explain, on the basis of the transference alone, the psychoanalytic "cure":

> A common conception of psychoanalysis puts the

> analyst in a position of mastery and exteriority: like the critic standing outside a text, the analyst is said to interpret the patient's discourse, revealing his unconscious and his true identity. But transference, which Freud called a 'factor of undreamt of importance,' complicates the picture considerably, by disrupting the relation of mastery and problematizing the notion of identity. Analyst and patient get caught up in stories or scenarios--displaced repetitions in which the unconscious emerges. It is no longer quite clear whose stories these are, yet it is in this playing of roles that cures seem to be effected. (Culler in Valdes 9-10)

Culler's model, and others like it which valorize the role of the transference, are not mistaken about the paramount role of transference in analysis, but they clearly cannot take us beyond the Imaginary register, in which identities blur in the "playing of roles," and in which the cure, like a mutually-verified mirage, only "<u>seem</u>[s] to be effected."

Lacan's critique of ego-psychology is also a cultural critique of America's relentless "pursuit of happiness," that illusionary/delusionary state to which Harold Bloom imagines that critics aspire; his return to Freud is above all a return to the beyond of pleasure that Imaginary identification can supply. The Lacanian psychoanalytic model,

for the reasons outlined above, allows us to perform a reading of intertextual relationships which can 1) envision an intertextual space outside the passions of the nuclear family and filiation; 2) work through and with a notion of influence which above all recognizes its importance, but also recognizes its Imaginary character, acknowledges its potential for hegemony, and imagines its subversion; 3) mediate between theory and practice insofar as "Lacan's topology . . . is the interface between theory and practice" in that "it is the conduit of the theory into the praxis of the analytic session" (Glogowski 175); and, 4) orient the analysis of interliterary relationships, modelled on a post-structuralist model of intersubjectivity, in a textual, rather than biographical, direction, without losing sight of either differential power relations or experiential categories of difference as a site of contention.

It is this last claim which is perhaps least supported in my reading of Lacan: Lacan's theories, while they take account (if sometimes controversially) of gender, rarely, if ever, discuss the effects of racial difference on the dynamics of psychoanalysis. But inasmuch as Frantz Fanon, using a psychoanalytic model, acknowledges "race" as an Imaginary construction which has real and often devastating consequences for those who are powerless to challenge their oppressors, I can suggest that Lacan's demystification of the authority of the analyst, the "subject-supposed-to-

know," supplies precisely the gap into which we might insert the struggle for recognition that Fanon, Fredric Douglass, Zora Neale Hurston, Aimé Cesare, Alice Walker, Margaret Alexander Walker, and Toni Morrison, among many others, have engaged and continue to engage in. Cayatri Spivak argues that the retrieval of subaltern speech is such an inter-textual project:

> I am progressively inclined . . . to read the retrieval of the subaltern consciousness as the charting of what in post-structuralist language would be called the subaltern subject-effect. A subject-effect can be briefly plotted as follows: that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network ('text' in the general sense) of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on. ("Introduction" 12-13)

What prevents us from considering the Lacanian model a generalizing one which seeks to level cultural or experiential difference is Lacan's insistence that "the subject's passage from empty speech to full speech occurs at the moment when he brings 'the origins of his own person' into the present of analytic discourse" (Clark 149), an insistence which clearly privileges the analysand's personal history, or at least his recollection and reordering, in discourse,

of that history. Such a view of intertextuality, then, considers it to be the meeting ground of the experiential and epistemological: the experience of both analysand and analyst meet in the epistemological framework of the analytic encounter which is grounded in the locus of the Other.

It remains to be seen how the intertextual relationship between Toni Morrison and William Faulkner will be mapped onto the model of the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter. Who will occupy the place of the analyst, the "subject-supposed-to-know"; who will occupy the place of the analysand; what place will I, the critic, occupy? As we have seen, Lacan, with his notion of the analyst's desire and subsequent blurring of distinctions between transference and countertransference, complicates this issue for us:

> Freud insists on the complications of the analyst-patient relationship, echoing to some degree his earlier statement that 'four people are present in every sex-act,' because of the overdetermined nature of human sexuality itself. For in the later formulation of the transference, Freud insists that both parties are at once agents and object, transferents and transferees, masculine and feminine. Thus, even Lacan's description of analysis in the celebrated 'schema L' is merely 'a return to Freud' and to Freud's own concept of the complicated and overdetermined schema that under-

> lies every act of love. The essence of the transference is a drama of shifting power plays, in which players occupy different positions and assume different gender roles not only successively but simultaneously. (Flieger 197-8)

To address this problem, I want to return to Lacan's return to Freud.

> **No one reads Freud in quite the same way after reading Lacan--but then no one reads Lacan in quite the same way after reading Freud.** (Wilden xiv)

> **It is to the extent that Lacan precisely teaches us to read in Freud's text (in its textual excess) the signifiers of Freud's ignorance--the ignorance of his own knowledge--that Lacan can be considered Freud's most attentive reader. . . .** (Felman, Jacques Lacan 96)

> **Any return to Freud that gives substance to a teaching worthy of the name will be produced only by the path by which the most hidden truth is manifested in the revolutions of culture. This path is the only formation that we can pretend to transmit to those who follow us. It is called: a style.** (Lacan qtd. in Clark 165)[16]

Lacan's famous return to Freud, his rejection of his own (Lacan's) originality, is not incidental to my project: it acts out in practice the very notion of intertextuality that psychoanalytic theory can offer. It is clear that, for Lacan at the time of his excommunication from the International Psychoanalytic Association (1953), Freud can be said to have occupied the position of the "subject-supposed-to-know"--the position of the analyst, dead by then in fact as well as in theory. Ironically, then, as analyst of

Freud's texts and therefore student of Freud, Lacan can be seen to have occupied the place of the analysand. Lacan's own desire to become an analyst in his own right, as Lacan himself later theorized, is aligned "with the more immediate and passionate desire for the analyst, for what the analyst "knows," and for what the analyst wants to know--in other words, for what the analysand "supposes" the analyst wants /has" (Clark 194). But by locating his own speech in the other's (Freud's) discourse, Lacan discovers/creates anOther Freud, an uncanny Freud who, we must suspect, would be startled to see his reflection in Lacan's texts. Paradoxically, however, Lacan's effort to efface his originality (insofar as originality is defined in reference to temporal priority) through his deference, not to Freud, but to the letter or style of Freud, results in his strongest claim to originality in the sense of his uniqueness and particularly his differentiation from other "Freudians." Shoshana Felman explains the trajectory of such a path:

> True originality . . . is precisely the way in which a reflexive movement, in returning to and upon itself, in effect subverts itself--finds something other than what it had expected, what it had set out to seek; the way in which the answer is bound in effect to displace the question; the way in which what is revolving, what returns to itself, radically displaces the very point of

observation. (Jacques Lacan 67)

By resisting received notions of Freudian thought and by explicating the Other Freud--the intertextual Freud, the Freud of Hegel and the Freud of Saussure and of course the Freud of Lacan--to Freud's disciples, Lacan embarked on a course of alienation which would lead to his estrangement from the psychoanalytic community, but one that allowed him to "displace the question" and to "radically [displace] the very point of observation": the Freudian text. True to the historical Freud, Lacan fought a long and bitter battle with straying disciples; true to the Freud of his own invention, Lacan ultimately refused to be the knowledge that he was supposed to know and therefore seemingly deliberately failed to found a school.

Lacan's refusals--his refusal to accept received notions of Freud's texts, his refusal to bow to the pressures of the conventional psychoanalytic school, and his refusal to found, in any decisive manner, his own school--seem to me to be as significant as his avowed adherence to the text of Freud. They mark his place as analysand cum analyst in a way that is, I think, analogous to the passage beyond influence that I would like to trace (not necessarily diachronically) in the work of Toni Morrison. Similar to Lacan in his relationship to Freud, Morrison devoted a portion of her career to the study of Faulkner's work, placing him (along with Virginia Woolf) in her Master's

thesis as the "subject-supposed-to-know" in relationship to her own desire to be a critic/writer. While Morrison has at no point in her career avowed a "return to Faulkner" along the lines of Lacan's return to Freud, she has continued to acknowledge, literally, his "mastery" and has been unable to escape the comparisons that critics, including this one, feel compelled to make between her work and that of Faulkner. Rather than echo Morrison's repeated denial of Faulkner's influence upon her work, what I would like to suggest here is that, like Lacan in his return to Freud, Morrison in her work returns to Faulkner, neither to pay homage to nor to castigate him, but ultimately to reread Faulkner's interpretation of the African-American woman; to reveal what Faulkner did not know he was saying/seeing/hearing, and to restore him, through her passionate indifference, to the ignorance that is the rightful possession/position of the "subject-supposed-to-know." But in the passage from student of Faulkner's writing to author in her own right, Morrison repeats Lacan's gestures vis-à-vis Freud, first, by rejecting much of the received wisdom regarding Faulkner, and second, in taking over the position of "subject-supposed-to-know," by adopting a "style" which recognizes but refuses to answer directly to Faulkner's, and our own, demand for her knowledge.

What I will suggest is that the intertextual economy that binds Morrison and Faulkner is not the closed economy

of commodity exchange and consumption driven by a capitalist supply and demand model, but one characterized by an interrogation of the very values on which we base such exchanges:

> In an intellectual hierarchy which constantly makes everyone answerable, unanswerability alone can call the hierarchy directly by its name. The circulation sphere, whose stigmata are borne by intellectual outsiders, opens a last refuge to the mind that it barters away, at the very moment when refuge no longer exists. He who offers for sale something unique that no one wants to buy, represents, even against his will, freedom from exchange. (Adorno [Minima Moralia] qtd. in Said Culture, 333)

In spite of her critical and commercial success, it is into such an economy that we must place Morrison's evasiveness regarding Faulkner's, or for that matter any influence on her work: to be influenced is to be answerable to the demands of an already constructed literary history. But if Morrison escapes the economy of influence, she cannot escape a "circulation sphere" which James Snead characterizes as operative in African-American cultural forms:

> In black culture, repetition means that the thing circulates (exactly in the manner of any flow, including capital flows) there in an equilibrium, In European culture, repetition must be seen to be

> not just circulation and flow but accumulation and growth. In black culture, the thing (the ritual, the dance, the beat) is 'there for you to pick it up when you come back to get it.' If there is a goal . . . in such a culture, it is always deferred: it continually 'cuts' back to the start, in the musical meaning of 'cut' as an abrupt, seemingly unmotivated break (an accidental dacapo) with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior series. ("Repetition" 67)

It should not be surprising, then, given Snead's comments and Morrison's own comments on the relationship of the style of her work to musical forms, that we should find many of the intertextual sites in this study linked by reference to music, particularly African-American musical forms such as gospel, blues, and jazz.

As I hope to demonstrate, Morrison, in her stylistic return to Faulkner, does not supply an answer to the demand generated by Faulkner's ignorance about the African-American, particularly the African-American woman, but rather her work, read in conjunction with that of Faulkner, has the effect of deferring closure and sustaining desire by turning these very questions back onto Faulkner's texts. Having met Faulkner's "gaze" and acknowledged his "desire," Morrison recognizes Faulkner's question--"What do you [i.e. as an African-American woman] want?"--but locates her

response in the field of the other--"What does he [William Faulkner] want of me?" By doing so, Morrison creates anOther Faulkner, one whose work resonates with a desire that reveals its own alterity. Patrick Magee points out the significance of such a displacement for retheorizing the concept of intersubjectivity:

> Positing the value of the other is the first step in the deconstruction of the authority of the Subject of History, the 'overturning.' What is overturned is nothing less than the inscription of Habermas's concept of intersubjectivity in an ideal speech situation, whose goal of universal consensus can lead only to imperialist knowledge by effacing the alterities that emerge from the construction of fixed subject positions. Beyond this overturning, however, lies the necessity of a 'displacement' of any subject position as a stable value toward the intersubject that is neither a subject nor an other. The intersubject . . . bears a relation to what Lacan calls the "big Other," Baudrillard "symbolic exchange," and Derrida the "totally other." These terms are not equivalent but gesture toward a form of human relationship that disrupts the order of value and the class discourses derived from it. (11)

Establishing an intertextual relationship between Morrison

and Faulkner is merely one way of revealing the inter-subjective alterity that haunts not only all texts but all (inter)textual relationships. Moreover, modelling such an intertextual reading on the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter allows me to explore this alterity without arguing for a contingent or necessary configuration of inter-textuality such as those envisioned by Harold Bloom or Michael Riffaterre: in other words, the relationship between Morrison and Faulkner is neither the biologically pre-destined one of daughter to father, nor is it the linguistically pre-destined one of Riffaterrean completion. This means that we do not need Morrison's texts to reveal the alterity in Faulkner's work any more than we need Faulkner to understand Morrison's portrayal of African-Americans. Nonetheless, I think that we might require the example of a reading between the work of Faulkner and Morrison to demonstrate that it is possible to imagine an intertextual reading practice that can negotiate between traditional influence studies with their emphasis on identity, and a post-structuralist deferral of (textual) difference as exemplified earlier in readings of minstrelsy. Starting from the position of viewing Morrison the critic as a student of Faulkner the writer, and moving to the possibility of Morrison as the (re)writer of Faulkner's texts, we can acknowledge the real disparities in power that characterize such a relationship while improvising a way out

of the neo-colonialist impasse of filial debt; we need only ring the appropriate change on Ralph Ellison's words: "While one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as an artist, choose one's 'analyst.'"

I have suggested how we might map the relative positions of Morrison and Faulkner on the (overdetermined) grid of the analytic encounter, but in what position(s) does that leave me, the critic?[17] In one of my roles, I occupy the site of intervention, in the sense not of a mediator, but of one who interferes. I am the one who makes appointments, punctuates sessions, collects payment, keeps the books. I am the one who listens, but I am also the one who interrupts, jumps to conclusions, halts the dialogue, silences speech. In this role, I occupy one of the sites held by the analyst, but the analyst in her function as authoritarian/patriarch, not properly dead, but awakened to the thankless, if not always fruitless, job of interpretation. Although the analyst in this function is always mistaken, Lacan tells us that the work cannot be performed in any other way.

But, as my discussion of the relationships between Lacan and Freud, Morrison and Faulkner makes clear, my intervention is also an in(ter)vention, conducted from the site of the analysand in my role as critic not only of Faulkner, Morrison, and Lacan, but as student in the academic institution. As such, I am also always subject to the

discourse of the Other and therefore always susceptible to being caught up in the transference. Above all, what is clear is that my position can never be said to be "neutral" or "objective": where and when I intervene in the discourse of Faulkner and Morrison will always betray something about me, about my motivations and desires and fears. Roy Schafer, describing the work of psychoanalysis applied to textual interpretation, explains the inevitability of this position:

> To take clinical analytic work as text interpretation is to establish the analyst as an influential co-author of the analytic text that is being interpreted. The text, in other words, is never fully delivered to the analyst; rather, it evolves out of the analysand's and the analyst's interpenetrating contributions. Increasingly, the two of them inhabit the text of the analysis, and at times it does seem that cohabit would be the best word for it. Cohabitation is what follows from throwing into question manifest content, including manifest avowals of intent and other such 'explanations.' In the end, the text and its interpretation are not distinguishable. (199)

In the next chapter, I will discuss the way that Absalom, Absalom!, one of the two Faulkner novels which Morrison examined in her Master's thesis, exemplifies the "cohabited"

text and, as such, provides both a model for Morrison's "style" and a catalyst for her interrogation of African-American signification in Faulkner's work.

NOTES

[1] For example, Alexander says that "[Faulkner] maintains . . . most of the sexual stereotypes and racial taboos that have racial labels. He clings to the plantation ideas and stereotypes of the faithful old retainer, the black wet nurse, the mammy, the kind of Negro that Dilsey is. . . . He either knows no educated blacks or has no respect for them" (117).

[2] Susan Willis ("Eruptions"), for example, suggests that Morrison, in Song of Solomon parodies the three-woman household in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!

[3] Benvenuto and Kennedy dispute the fact that Freud was unaware of Saussurean linguistics: "Whereas Lacan pointed out that Freud did not have available to him the discoveries of modern linguistics, from the work of Saussure onwards, he did not go on to explain why Freud was ignorant of Saussure's work, in spite of having opportunities to become familiar with it" (15).

[4] Seminar I (1953-54): Les écrits techniques de Freud. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975. 64.

[5] Lettres de l'Ecole freudienne de Paris 3 (1967): 3-33. Summary by Jacques Nassif.

[6] Seminar II (1954-55): Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse. Ed. Jacques Alain-Miller. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978. 37-38.

[7] "Le complexe, facteur concret de la psychologie familiale." Encyclopédie française VIII: La vie mentale. Ed. Henri Wallon. Paris: Larousse, Société de gestion de

l'Encyclopédie française, 1938.

[8] Télévision. Interview with Jacques-Alain Miller for the Service de recherche of the O.R.T.F. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974.

[9] Seminar IV (1956-57): La relation d'objet et les structures freudiennes. Abstract by J. -B Pontalis approved by Lacan. Bulletin de psychologie 10 (1957): 426-30. 428.

[10] I do not pretend to have laid to rest here the seething controversy regarding Lacan's alleged misogyny and/or obfuscation of the feminine. However, I do take the view that to reject all of Lacan's theories on the basis of our interpretations of some of his views is tantamount to engaging in the kind of criticism that would seek a "final solution" to some of the problematic statements of Faulkner in rejecting all of Faulkner's work; obviously, this is the kind of engagement that I would refer to as characteristic of Imaginary relationships.

[11] cf. Spivak, especially "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and "Introduction" to Selected Subaltern Studies.

[12] "Variante de la cure-type." Easter 1955. Encyclopédie médico-chirurgicale, psychiatrie, tome III, 2-1955, fasicule 37812-C10. Ed. Henry Ey.

[13] Abstract by Lacan in Annuaire de l'Ecole pratique des hautes études. Section des sciences économiques et sociales, 1968-69. 213-20.

[14] "Proposition du 9 octobre 1967 sur le psychanalyse de l'Ecole." Scilicet 1 (1968): 14-29.

[15] Seminar II (1954-55): Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse. Ed. Jacques Alain-Miller. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978. 287-88.

[16] "La psychanalyse et son enseignement." Société française de philosophie, 23 February 1957. Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie 51, no. 2 (1957): 65-85. 85.

[17] In an unpublished seminar (1970) Lacan discusses "the four fundamental discourses--of mastery, of the bureaucracy, of hysteria, and of analysis" (Elliot 12). I would suggest that as much as we, as academics, strive to achieve truly analytical discourse, our work will always be interpenetrated by the other three discourses.

CHAPTER TWO: 'DESIRES BECOME WORDS'[1]:

READING BETWEEN (IN) ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

We are doomed historically to history, to the patient construction of discourses about discourses, and to the task of hearing what has already been said. (Michel Foucault, qtd. in Sheridan x)

I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever (Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom! 277)

I was so sure that it would happen. That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle. (Morrison, Jazz 220)

I suggested at the end of the previous chapter that Morrison's return to Faulkner, like Lacan's return to Freud, takes the form of a style. But what is a style? More precisely, what is Faulkner's style, to which Morrison is alleged to return? Craig Werner offers a series of possible answers to my question:

> 'Faulknerian' . . . is a term I understand to mean any story with long sentences, two narrators, italics, and incest, which is superficially more difficult to comprehend than the feature section of USA Today. If it is a second novel set in the same fictional country as the author's first, or involves the killing of a large nonaquatic animal, any two of the preceding provisions may be waived. ("Minstrel Nightmares" 38)

By way of comparison, consider Morrison's use of incest and italics in The Bluest Eye; her use of small town Ohio as a

setting in several of her novels; the important hunting scene, which culminates in the killing of a cougar and Milkman's initiatory consumption of its heart, in Song of Solomon; the narrative complexity and multiple narrators of Beloved. If we were to add to Werner's list a propensity for Biblical allusion and rhythms, the frequent use of verbal negation, and the frank portrayal of perverse and sometimes violent sexuality, the similarity between the two writers might seem to be even more remarkable. It would appear, by Werner's definition, that Morrison is indeed a "Faulknerian."

But of course, when Werner delivers his definition of what it is to be "Faulknerian," his tongue is planted firmly in his cheek. His catalogue is a parody of the type of literary history represented in Leslie Fiedler's book Love and Death in the American Novel, in which Fiedler, among other things, traces Faulkner's stylistic influence through several generations of American writers to those "distaff" and "feminizing Faulknerians," women writers such as Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, and Carson McCullers, and homosexual writers such as Truman Capote, who were nonetheless, according to Fiedler, unable to match their forefather's prowess:

> Against a background of miasmic swamps and sweating black skins, the Faulknerian syndrome of disease, death, defeat, mutilation, idiocy, and lust

> continues to evoke in the stories of these writers a shudder once compelled only by the supernatural. What tends to be dissipated in their fiction . . . is the grossness, the sheer dirtiness, the farce and howling burlesque, all that keeps Faulkner from ever seeming precious, or, in any meaningful sense of the word, decadent. (450)

Such an analysis uncovers one of the potential problems with comparing the writing styles of any two authors: the danger of collapsing, as does Fiedler, similarity into a valorized identity, and then lamenting the inevitable divergences and shortfalls in the "copy." But the other problem, even more formidable I think, is the danger of reducing <u>everything</u> to style, even to the point of casting difference (in terms of either the gender, race or sexual orientation of the author) into aesthetic or stylistic categories without taking into consideration the historical, social, and political exigencies of textual production.

Since what I propose to do in this chapter is to trace the intertextual relationship between Morrison and Faulkner through Morrison's return to Faulkner's style in <u>Absalom, Absalom!</u>, it is not insignificant that Werner's deliberately exaggerated assessment of what is distinctly Faulknerian about Faulkner is perhaps best exemplified in that novel. Indeed, <u>Absalom</u> epitomizes for many contemporary critics not just Faulkner's style, but the style of modernism itself,

making it, perhaps second only to James Joyce's Ulysses, a benchmark for an entire epoch in literature. As such, Absalom has attained the distinction of being a text that is rarely discussed now except in terms of its style.

Moreover, the style of Absalom--its indeterminacy, its plurivocality, its acute self-consciousness, in short its "writerliness"--can be said to resemble the style that Julia Kristeva has labelled "semiotic" and has valorized in the works of several other male modernist writers. Inspired by Kristevan analysis, some critics have in turn claimed this style specifically for texts written by women and/or African-Americans. Adriana Rodenas, for example, claims for women's writing "a poetics of difference," and without addressing the fact that Kristeva's analysis is of male-authored texts, Rodenas uses Kristevan stylistic analysis to explain the linguistic basis for her claim for a distinctly feminine writing:

> Faced with the rigid language of binary oppositions, feminine expression, parody, and other noncanonical texts delight in Difference. By violating grammatical categories, women's writing stresses ambivalence and plurality, wordplay and fantasy, thus uncovering the forbidden barrier between the masculine and the feminine. (41)

In a similar manner, Mae Gwendolyn Harrison appears to rely heavily on Kristeva when she claims that

> What is at once characteristic and suggestive about black women's writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with the "other(s)," but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women's writings is, thus, not only a consequence of a dialogic relationship with an imaginary or "generalized Other," but a dialogue with the aspects of "otherness" with the self. The complex situatedness of the black woman as not only the "Other" of the Same, but also the "other" of the other(s) implies . . . a relationship of difference and identification with the "other(s)." (Harrison 17)

Elsewhere, Michael Awkward, in his description of Zora Neale Hurston's style, argues,

> What Hurston does on the level of narration is to offer an example of an Afro-American pattern of verbal communication that represents <u>collective interaction</u> rather than <u>individual dictation</u>. The narrative strategies of her novel serve as a manifestation of Janie's insistence that distinct voices can be conjoined by means of emotional and psychological affinity, that, indeed, "mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf." It is a narration

> informed by the protagonist's knowledge and spirit, but not controlled by her voice. (Awkward, Inspiriting Influences 55)

What is remarkable about each of the above claims is that, with the appropriate alterations to the proper names, any one of them might as easily be made with reference to Faulkner's style in Absalom, Absalom!.

While it is not my intention here to disagree with the way any of these critics have characterized the work of black women writers, I think it is important to note the dangers inherent in so strongly associating a particular style with a particular race or gender. The effect of such a strategy, carried to its logical conclusion, may be the exact opposite of what its proponents intend: indeed, the effect may be to efface entirely the distinction between writers of different races or genders, and to diminish the possibility of a truly effective oppositional discourse. Once a (mostly) male modernist poetics has been co-opted for a feminist or African-American feminist aesthetics, it is but a small step to the conclusion that Minrose C. Gwin draws in The Feminine and Faulkner: Reading (Beyond) Sexual Difference when she extends the above claims to a consideration of Faulkner's texts as feminine:

> In [Faulkner's] texts, . . . otherness speaks with a woman's voice. "She" speaks a discourse of difference. Her silence resonates. Her madness

> questions. Her woman's blood floods these pages, and seeps beyond them into places we do not know how to name. (152)

This type of criticism, as I have argued earlier, may be seen as serving the purpose of re-authorizing canonical texts through the use of "enlightened" critical methods, but it also tends to obscure the respective positions of both author and reader.

While it has become unfashionable, indeed redundant, in terms of modern discourse analysis to differentiate between style and content, or even to imagine the possibility of such a distinction, some contemporary theorists have suggested that stylistic characterization alone is insufficient to account for the rhetorical effects of the published word. As Rita Felski advises,

> it can be argued that French feminism reveals an overestimation of the radical effects of linguistic indeterminacy which has not come to terms with the contemporary realization of the political limitations of modernism. Such a position, moreover, tacitly if not explicitly limits an oppositional culture to the reading and writing practices of an intellectual elite, and fails to offer any adequate explanatory account of the relationship between the subversion of internal formal structures and process of social change. Any such

> abstract conception of a feminine text cannot cope with the heterogeneity and specificity of women's cultural needs, including, for example, the development of a sustained analysis of black women's or lesbian writing, which is necessarily linked to issues of representation and cannot be adequately addressed by simply arguing the "subversive" nature of formal self-reflexivity. (5-6)

Felski argues that "a link between literature and feminism can only be established if a text addresses themes in some way relevant to feminist concerns; multiplicity, indeterminacy, or negativity are not in themselves specifically feminist, or indeed specifically anything" (7); Hazel Carby echoes that since "black and feminist cannot be absolute, transhistorical forms . . . of identity," issues of racism and sexism need to be historicized, specified (17-18). So while this chapter will seek a model for the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison in the style exhibited in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, I will later make it clear, in the way that Werner's parody suggests, that Morrison's return to Faulkner is not simply reducible to a style any more than Absalom itself is. To revert to Lacan's definition of style as a "path," we must also theorize a destination: for Morrison, a destination beyond style to the irreducible truth of Faulkner's desire and the reclamation of her own through "the defiles of the signifier."

Writing reflects. It reflects on other writings and, whenever awareness emerges, on itself as writing. Like the Japanese boxes that contain other boxes, nest one inside the other ad nihilum, writing is meshing one's writing with the machinery of endless reflexivity. Footprints of emptiness multiplied to infinity in an attempt at disarming death. She says to unsay others so that others may unsay her and say: It's still not it. This circular but still linear reasoning inescapably reduces reality to a chain of causes and effects. It most likely leads to a nihilistic understanding of emptiness, one that tends to define it as a negation of the existence of things. (Minh-ha 23)

the subject of the dream is the dreamer Morrison, Playing 17)

The style of Absalom, Absalom! has been described by many critics in many ways, but Michel Gresset, when he says that Absalom, Absalom! is "very likely to remain unmatched as an intertextual novel and as a discourse on intertextuality. ("Introduction" 5), suggests a way of discussing Faulkner's style that plunges us directly into the debate surrounding the meaning of the word intertextuality. By calling Absalom an "intertextual novel," (5), Gresset provokes the question of what we actually understand him to mean by the term "intertextuality." In subsequent discussions of the novel, collected at the Second International Faulkner Colloquium (1982), various critics indicate some of the possibilities: on the one hand, they remind us of Absalom's allusive relationship to other texts: the Bible, but also other Yoknapatawpha novels and stories written by Faulkner, notably, but not exclusively, The Sound and the Fury. On the other hand, as Gresset claims, these critics also refer to the novel's "internal intertextuality" (9), or

"the text as intertext" (10): what is sometimes known as "intra-textuality." What Gresset appears to mean by "internal intertextuality" is that Absalom is a novel which contains, between its own covers, many competing "texts": not only the many and sometimes conflicting modes of discourse (Genealogy, Chronology, Map), but the many and sometimes conflicting narrative voices (polyphyny) that intersect the trajectory of what might otherwise have been a simple tale of one man's attempt to achieve social and financial success during a turbulent time in the American south.

But neither the relationship of Absalom to other texts nor Faulkner's employment of multiple points of view in a single novel distinguishes this novel in any meaningful or absolute sense from other modernist, or indeed some pre-modernist texts. Just as the idea that the text is inevitably caught up in a large, even nebulous, web of discourse underwrites a particular way of viewing textuality rather than a way of defining particular texts,[2] the concept of internal textual non-identity--the radical instability of any text--can be understood as well to characterize a theory of textuality rather than a taxonomy.[3] Such thinking, moreover, comprises the very foundation of early theories of intertextuality formulated by Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Barthes. If, by calling it an "intertextual novel," Gresset means that Absalom is only part of a larger network of discourse (Kristeva and Barthes) which contains within it

multiple narrative voices (Bakhtin), then he has not distinguished the novel from others in any way that might lead us to a description of Faulkner's style, but has merely reiterated Bakhtin's description of the novel itself:

> The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types . . . and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia . . . can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization--this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (263, emphasis added)

The difficulty of discussing intertextuality in terms of specific texts or specific intertextual relationships, given the imbrication of intertextual theory in post-structuralist

semiotics, prompts Thaïs E. Morgan to conclude that the "very notion of intertextuality turns out to be a mise-en-abîme, an abyss of infinite semiosis at whose brink we stand, delighted or terrified" (18).

Not surprisingly, then, when we contemplate Gresset's assertion that Absalom, Absalom! is an "intertextual novel," we stand at the "mise-en-abîme" of "infinite semiosis," reminded of Michael Riffaterre's admonition that "the very idea of textuality is inseparable from and founded upon intertextuality" ("Syllepsis" 625). Since it is impossible to discuss Absalom as an "intertextual novel," as the very term continues to elude our grasp, indeed as it continues to beg the question of what is textuality itself, I am left with no choice but to take the other path suggested by Gresset and to discuss the novel as, potentially, a "discourse on intertextuality" (Gresset 5): in other words, to attempt to "discover" in Faulkner's practice an articulation of intertextual theory that may shed light on both his style and the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison. Ultimately, I will return to Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossia" as it pertains to Absalom, and will suggest that insofar as voices in the novel are "always more or less dialogized," it is possible to chart a path across the uncrossable space of "infinite semiosis."

desire and history . . . having a conversation (O'Donnell, "Sub Rosa" 28)

Absalom, Absalom! is, on one level, a novel about the rise and fall of a man named Thomas Sutpen. Early critics of the novel who attempted to read and critique it on that level, however, were driven to regard Absalom as a monumental failure. With little regard for linear chronology (and sometimes little regard for the chronology appended to the novel), Sutpen's story, which spans a century of turbulent southern American history, is transmitted to the reader through the (often indirect) testimony of at least eight narrators, two of whom--Quentin Compson and Shreve McCannon --were not even born during Sutpen's lifetime. The indeterminacies of the novel are by now legendary: not only do individual narrators blatantly contradict each other's versions of events, but Faulkner also introduced and allowed to stand discrepancies among the narrative and the textual apparati, and even between the appended chronology and genealogy. It is little wonder that the earliest critics' of the novel responded to its publication in much the same way that Jason Compson, in the novel, responds to the story of Sutpen:

> Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them. They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the

> paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs. (AA 101)

In the above passage, Compson describes a practice of reading the "text" of the past in terms of a hermeneutics which both predicts some of the early critics' responses to the novel and, with its own admission of failure, anticipates their frustrations.

But if it is the staggering number of competing voices and "facts" within Absalom, Absalom! that baffled some of its first critics, it is precisely that same style that has inspired others, particularly in the last twenty or so years, to consider Absalom in terms of post-structuralist theories of language and the (inter)subjective construction of meaning and to valorize it as a discourse on intertextuality. In support of their readings of the text

as a productivity, rather than a construct, some critics have pointed to Quentin Compson's allegory of reading the past:

> Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm . . . Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us. (AA 261-2, italics omitted)

In the next few pages I will attempt to explicate and read between the critical models of reading suggested in both of the above passages from Absalom in an effort to construct a "discourse on intertextuality." But what my analysis of Absalom ultimately hopes to show is that the two

theories that can be constructed from these passages--theories which have most often been opposed by critics as containing mutually exclusive approaches to understanding the past based on diametrically opposed ideologies--instead coalesce in their announcement of the failure of an epistemologically grounded hermeneutics, their valorization of ontological truth sustained in Imaginary relationships, and their subsequent admission of the impossibility of meaningful or productive intersubjective communication. For that reason, I will conclude that neither reading strategy provides a model from which we can construct the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison. Instead, our failure to do so will prompt me to consider in the limitations of "transference" as a trope for intertextuality the potential racism and sexism of some intertextual models, and the necessity of searching for other models within the text.

First, however, I must briefly sketch the "problem" addressed in these models by the narrators of the Sutpen story, not the easiest task since the problem itself is in fact generated within the narrative chain, initially by Rosa Coldfield's demand that Quentin Compson listen to her story about her relationship with Thomas Sutpen and that he accompany her to Sutpen's Hundred, but also by Quentin's demand that his father tell him why Rosa is so obsessed with Sutpen and why she chose him [Quentin] as her confidante, and Shreve McCannon's demand that his Harvard room-mate tell him

"about the South" (AA 174). The problem, then, in its simplest form, is how to tell the story of Thomas Sutpen's failed dynasty in a way that meets the demand of various interlocutors and makes the known actions and outcomes of the past seem connected in a narrative sense, that is to say, motivated. Central to this process is determining the motivations for the murder of Charles Bon by Thomas Sutpen's son Henry which prevented Bon's marriage to Judith Sutpen, and the reasons for Henry's subsequent disappearance from the county.

Compson's approach to understanding the Sutpen story appears to be that of the traditional historian whose task it is to sift through an inert and finite bedrock of discernible, collatable data to discover the "something" that, once apprehended and recovered, will render what is now unintelligible once again "readable." Reconstructing the past for Compson, in spite of his metaphor, is actually less like experimenting with a "chemical formula" than it is like trying to assemble a prefabricated puzzle whose pieces have been scattered, some of them lost: that at one time these pieces formed a complete, comprehensive picture goes without saying. In other words, Compson subscribes to the notion of what Gadamer describes as a "fore-conception of completeness" which compels him to "assume an immanent unity of meaning," and in which "his understanding is likewise guided by the constant transcendent expectations of meaning that

proceed from the relation to the truth of what is being said" (294). Operating from within a field of logical non-contradiction, Compson adheres to the "law of coherence":

> This law of coherence is a heuristic rule, a procedural obligation, almost a moral constraint of research: not to multiply contradictions uselessly; not to be taken in by small differences; not to give too much weight to changes, disavowals, returns to the past, and polemics; not to suppose that men's discourse is perpetually undermined from within by the contradiction of their desires, the influences that they have been subjected to, or the conditions in which they live; but to admit that if they speak, and if they speak among themselves, it is rather to overcome these contradictions, and to find the point from which they will be able to be mastered. But this same coherence is also the result of research: it defines the terminal unities that complete the analysis; it discovers the internal organization of a text, the form of development of an individual <u>oeuvre</u>, or the meeting-place of different discourses. In order to reconstitute it, it must first be presupposed, and one will only be sure of finding it if one has pursued it far enough and for long enough. It appears as an optimum: the

> greatest possible number of contradictions resolved by the simplest means. (Foucault, Archaeology 149)

The second assumption implicit in Mr. Compson's model for reading the past is related to the first: if the historical event can (or should) be "presupposed" as a complete entity--a two-dimensional picture constructed out of "the letters from that forgotten chest"--then it is conceptualized as a discrete unit, disembodied, suspended in a linear, regressive chronology which is susceptible to teleological probings into such phenomena as origins, causes, and effects. The historical investigator--Compson--sees himself as existing outside of or at least certainly temporally beyond and therefore separate from the chronological period that is the object of his investigation, and the distance afforded by such objectivity both hinders ("the shapes" are "shadowy" and "inscrutable") and assists him: he does, after all, have access to documents that only the passage of time--effecting the deaths of principal figures in the story of Sutpen--could yield to him.

Above all, the practice of reading the past described by Jason Compson in this passage from Absalom is governed by a belief in the quantifiable nature of historical phenomena and the equally empirical existence of an observer whose role it is simply to compile, arrange, and interpret data in such a way as to render the observed phenomena intelligible,

consumable. Undoubtedly and even inevitably, Compson strays from his avowed program when he offers Quentin speculative versions of many of the crucial events into which he inquires, but it is nonetheless significant that the additional information provided by these speculations, because it increases "the possible number of contradictions," serves only to obscure for Compson the ultimate "truth" that he seeks. Searching for the one piece of the puzzle that he thinks might be missing, Compson fabricates a series of embellishments that seem to make it all the more difficult for him to complete it. So, although he may "play" with the "facts" of Sutpen's life, Compson invariably retreats from the implications of his own speculative inquiry to something equivalent to his chastened admission that "they dont explain and we are not supposed to know" (124).

With this admission, Compson's program is revealed to be inadequate to its task: the synthesis of raw data into a coherent, non-contradictory picture of the past. However, despite his admitted failure to recover the "true" story of Sutpen's downfall, Jason Compson never seems to doubt his methods or the assumptions on which they are based. Almost to the end a staunch empiricist, he is merely resigned to the belief that the essential facts regarding the story may have been irrevocably lost with the passage of time. Lacking sufficient compatible data to complete his picture, he must be content for now with the fragments in his pos-

session. Whatever speculation he engages in, however personally satisfying, must inevitably lead him further from the truth he seeks.[5] But ultimately, Compson admits, the problem is not epistemological at all; it is ontological. Before he shows Quentin Bon's letter--documentary proof of the existence of the past--Compson admits to the impossibility of shedding light on the Bon-Judith-Henry affair:

> 'Maybe even the light of day . . . would be too much for it, for them. Yes, for them: of that day and time, of a dead time; people too as we are, and victims too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex. . . .' (AA 89)

The failure to understand the past, Compson says here, has less to do with the loss of key facts or documents than with the loss of classical history itself, imaged as an unfallen, heroic age: in order to understand the past, Compson says, one would have had to be born <u>then</u>.

In contrast to Compson's very explicit description of how one might attempt a reading of the past, Quentin's pebble analogy only poetically and implicitly suggests such a project. As the passage has been heavily interpreted,[6] it would perhaps be useful to attend first to its literal description of the phenomenon of the dropped pebble and only

afterwards to potential explications of it vis-à-vis theories of textual transmission and intertextuality to whose support it has been enlisted. Quentin uses the analogy of the dropped pebble to illustrate his claim that "Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once. . . ." Significantly, though, he neither describes the actual dropping of the pebble nor implicates human agency in its fall. Semantically reversing the order of cause and effect, Quentin alludes to "ripples maybe on water" even before he mentions the pebble which created them, a pebble whose origin and appearance are entirely obscured from us because it has already disappeared beneath the water. In other words, the pebble's existence and the fact that it fell into the water can only be presumed on the basis of the evidence of ripples that emanate concentrically from some (perhaps indeterminable) point of origin at their center.

Quentin goes on to describe the nature of these ripples: they both repeat the pattern of "the original ripple-space" in an "old ineradicable rhythm," and vary it, containing as they do "a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered." But they continue to do so without any explicit awareness of the phenomenon which created them: "that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too." The dissolution of discrete, personified ("having

seen, felt, remembered") identity that this implies is suggested more explicitly in Quentin's comment that "maybe Father and I are both Shreve." But Quentin also suggests the determinative and reversible nature of the flow of energy from the original ripple-space by implying a chronological reversal: not only is it possible that it took "Thomas Sutpen to make all of us," but maybe it took "Shreve and me both to make Father."

It is easy to see how this passage might be interpreted as a commentary on narrative transmission in the novel. If we attempt to relate the dropping of the pebble (by an unseen hand) to certain events in Sutpen's life which continue to have a "rippling" effect on the present, then the narrative authority of Quentin and Shreve, who together construct a plausible, if imaginative version, of the events of the past, is an apparent reversal of the image that the analogy implies. It is only by taking our cue from the analogy itself and considering the phenomenal nature of the rippling effect that we can understand the privileging of narrative over empirical authority. Just as the ripples offer the only visible proof of the sunken pebble's existence, the effects of the past are the only palpable indicators of historical truth. Instead of a loss of energy (authority) as the waves widen and weaken in their movement further from the source, the story of Sutpen appears to gain energy and momentum, and even a kind of authenticity, as it

is transferred from narrator to narrator in a widening circle that moves ever further from the source, to the point that Shreve, a Canadian by birth, supplies some of the most compelling narrative details. Through his image, Quentin perhaps invites us to speculate not only on how the past is created and re-created through compulsive narrative repetition, but also how the human desire to "know" and therefore master the past provides the very structure and content of historical narrative, suggesting quite forcefully what historiographers since the mid-nineteenth century[7] (and, not coincidentally, Sigmund Freud) have suspected: the paradox that in the very process of rendering the past transmissible by encoding historical events in narrative, we are inevitably, however unwillingly or unwittingly, forced to abandon claims to transparency and objectivity in favor of claims to intelligibility and coherence.

Perhaps Quentin's most radical departure from his father is his suggestion that the historian--the reader of the past--is inevitably trapped in the wake of the events he hopes to explain, and therefore unable to distinguish, with any degree of certainty, his own nature from that of which he is investigating. Quentin's theory, in striking counter-point to his father's description of the practice of historical reconstruction, nonetheless accounts for the highly idiosyncratic speculations which fuel Compson's narrative: however much Jason Compson claims to believe

that Sutpen and his contemporaries were "victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic" (AA 89), just by the process of speaking about them, he cannot help but invest them with complex and empirically unsubstantiated, if personally satisfying (to the investigator), motivations.

Quentin's pebble analogy, implying as it does the virtual dissolution of the boundaries of identity in a fluid, rhythmically recursive apprehension of historical phenomena, is obviously informed by very different assumptions than is the formula offered by his father. For Quentin, the search for historical truth is less a task to be undertaken and rigorously pursued than it is a birthright (or -curse) to be accepted, willingly or not. The past is not an object which he might study, but a pool into which he is born, immersed, and passively enveloped. Everything and everyone with which he comes into contact informs his understanding of the past and, perhaps, helps to determine the course of future events. Rather than complaining of a dearth of empirical data with which he might reconstruct the story of Sutpen, Quentin repeatedly bemoans the fact that he has "heard too much . . . too often" (207): I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever (AA 277).

Quentin at least temporarily arrests this interminable process of narrative recursion by succeeding where his father fails: he appears, by the end of the novel, to have discovered the truth about the motivations underlying Henry's murder of Bon when he supplies the additional information that Bon was Thomas Sutpen's mulatto son, although how he learns this is, as we shall see, the one remaining mystery of the text. But would it be prudent to conclude that Quentin's pebble analogy, taken as a theory of reading, is superior to that of his father? Indeed, is it possible to translate Quentin's theory of intersubjective transmission into a practice of reading at all? Although the text's deliberate withholding of a key step in Quentin's reconstruction of the past might suggest that such a practice would be non-empiricist, we are nonetheless confronted with what could be construed as the entirely empiricist problem of determining the status--or truth-value, perhaps--of Quentin's additional knowledge.

The mystification of the manner by which Quentin discovers the "truth" about the Sutpen tragedy is perhaps both a major stumbling block to an explication of the text and one of the most significant clues to its status as a discourse on intertextuality. Reading between the analogies suggested by Quentin and his father, it is possible to trace an attempt to evolve a theory of narrative transmission which seeks to overcome the tyranny of the historian's

empiricism by no less than redefining subjectivity itself. Quentin and his father face, at the outset, essentially the same problem, although they define it in very different ways: what Jason Compson perceives as a lack of sufficient coherent data with which to reconstruct the past, Quentin perceives as a surplus of information. The problem is that of "overdetermination": the presence of "more determining factors than are required" (OED), a surfeit of potentially conflicting findings which must either be repressed by the historical investigator by means of the law of coherence or remain with him or her as a source of oppression. Faced with this problem, Compson assumes that "something is missing," his son that "I have heard too much, I have been told too much; I have had to listen to too much, too long" (AA 207).

Quentin's pebble analogy proposes a solution to this dilemma by suggesting that the subject himself is overdetermined: "maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us." More precisely perhaps, the analogy suggests that the subject is aware of himself as overdetermined, inescapably burdened with the contradictory and infinite weight of both the past and the present and therefore has become, albeit reluctantly, the very medium through which history speaks. Quentin arrogates the privilege implicit in such a view of

the subject when he supplies the "missing" information regarding Charles Bon's identity, a privilege made even more explicit in Quentin's advice to Shreve: "You cant understand it. You would have to be born there [in the South]" (AA 361). Quentin, like his father before him, implies that what one knows can only ever be where or when one is. The perfect solipsism: a total eclipse of epistemology by a self-verifying ontological truth.

Were we to propose theories of intertextuality based, first, on Jason Compson's belief in the overdetermination (or, as he would more likely view it, the underdetermination) of historical data, and secondly, on Quentin's belief in the overdetermination of the subject, what forms would they take? Working from similar assumptions to those of Jason Compson--the quantifiable and teleogical nature of historical knowledge, the investigation of which is governed by the law of coherence, and the status of the historical investigator as an objective observer and recorder of historical phenomena--we might conclude first that the interaction between texts can only ever be viewed retrospectively and impersonally. While all texts must be considered potentially "meaningful," ultimately their significance can only be established by their ability (rather than the ability of the investigator to compel them) to form a coherent picture. Despite his failure to make the facts "explain," Compson's instrumental and rationalist view of the relationships

between texts might usefully be compared to that of the traditional literary historian whose job might be explicitly to order and categorize extant works of art, but who implicitly serves the formation and protection of canon. As a traditionalist *à la* Harold Bloom, moreover, Compson suffers from a sense of belatedness and even inferiority--he views Sutpen and his contemporaries as "larger, more heroic"--that renders him somewhat paralytically awe-stricken in his attempts to pass judgement on the fragments of the past in his possession.

Quentin's theory of intersubjective transmission appears to offer quite a different picture. The pebble analogy proposes diffusion, rather than discreteness, of identity and it rejects a diachronic, teleological model of textual relationships in favor of a synchronic one. Suggesting the radical imbrication of all textual matter, Quentin's analogy seems to reject both notions of origin and of originality in favor of repetition and imitation. Unlike his father, Quentin can be seen to privilege, rather than to disparage, his chronological belatedness when he fleetingly reverses the temporal primacy of father over son.

But if we consider the key omission from Compson's analogy of the incomplete chemical formula--the catalyst--we are in a better position to understand Quentin's pebble analogy *vis-à-vis* not only a theory of intertextuality, but also in a direct and equivalent relationship to his father's

approach to the past. In his influential work on textual relationships, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot used precisely the analogy of the chemical formula and the poet or writer's function as catalyst to present what was to be a revolutionary view of literary history. According to Thaïs E. Morgan:

> in deploying 'tradition' against the fallacy of 'individual talent,' Eliot alters the essential definition of each term in the opposition--an interesting instance of his own theory of literary relationships, in which several texts are transformed by their encounter in and with the catalytic 'mind of the poet' (4).

Morgan goes on to describe how Eliot's notion of the catalyst, like Quentin's pebble analogy, enacts a Bloomean reversal of the terms of filiation:

> . . . Eliot locates the individuality of the poet neither in his innovativeness nor in his imitativeness, but in his ability to include all previous literature in his work so that past and present discourses co-exist: '. . . we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously' (Eliot 1920: 48). This is a clever play on the critical metaphor of

> 'filiation,' another extension of the model of influence. Instead of using filiation to support the linear schema of literary history according to which the father is more worthy because closer to the origin than the son, Eliot reverses the implicit negativity of influence in favor of the son who acknowledges but also manipulates to his own ends the texts of his 'ancestors.' . . . Daringly, Eliot . . . reverses the directives of historicism and suggests the possibility that literature has no origins but only open sets of transformations within a closed system. . . . (4-5)

But by reinserting the belated subject as catalyst into the very history to which it is indebted, Eliot's theory raises questions that are equally relevant to Quentin's pebble analogy.

While Eliot's suggested reversal of poetic filiation appears to liberate the poet from the past, it would seem to do so at the cost of enslaving the past to the contemporary poet. Eliot's proposal that "when a new work of art is created," "something . . . happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it" (qtd. in Morgan 4-5) merely inverts the poles of privilege, granting the contemporary poet the potential ability to define and perhaps even enhance, through the allegiances of his or her own work, the value of past literary works. Moreover, Eliot's phrase,

"all the works of art," refers not to some amorphous global mass of textual material, but rather to those European works that have already been selected to form part of a literary tradition. Paradoxically, such a notion of filiation, in which literary grandfathers (and I mean that term in its narrowest sense) are exalted, ensures that it is also the contemporary poet's work whose status is thereby enhanced. Eliot's plea in the same essay for the elevation of the metaphysical poets, to whom he felt the sensibilities of his own work were indebted, confirms the solipsistic tendencies of such a project.

The solipsism inherent in Eliot's model of intertextual relations is first suggested in Compson's allusion to a "chemical formula" but is clearly echoed in Quentin's pebble analogy, and its effects appear to be confirmed when Quentin seizes priority over his father by supplying information--some of which, significantly, Quentin claims to have received from his grandfather--necessary to solve the puzzle. Like Eliot, both Quentin and his father feel the oppressive weight of the past and sense their belatedness, but Quentin attempts to compensate for his belatedness through a narrative coup which will establish his authority through the authority of his ancestor and, therefore, retrospectively reorganize the past. But for the overdetermined subject, the subject who always already knows himself to be overdetermined, such a victory can only ever be temporary at best,

possibly even pyrrhic, as Quentin's desperation at the end of this novel and his subsequent[8] death, recorded in the Genealogy, indicate: inevitably trapped within the very history he seeks to explicate, Quentin can arrest the proliferation of conflicting evidence only at the risk of situating himself in the interminable specularity suggested by his pebble image. If Jason Compson explicitly announces his failure to make the past explain because he feels that his belatedness prevents his obtaining the information he requires, Quentin disintegrates under the knowledge that everything in his possession is all he will ever need to know to make the past explain: ". . . I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do" (AA 277, italics omitted).

Reading between the analogies suggested by Quentin and his father, we can construct competing models not only for narrative transmission (and its failure) in the novel, but also for the history of its reception. Traditional, "mimetic" exegesis of the novel sought for over three decades (the fifties through part of the seventies, although versions of this type of criticism still exist) to unlock its essential mystery--the mystery of how Quentin and Shreve might have discovered the "truth" about Charles Bon's identity which lends credibility and coherence to an otherwise chaotic and inexplicable chain of events in the narrative.

Obsessed, like Jason Compson, with locating the missing piece of the puzzle, many of them overlooked the role that the narrative itself plays in constructing that truth: more precisely, but yet again like Compson, they undervalued the role that their own critical narratives had always already played in constructing the truth of the novel.

As the impulse toward hermeneutical exegeses of the text abated with the increasing acceptance and application of both psychoanalytic and post-structuralist critical methodologies, the attention of critics began to shift away from the plot of the novel to the interpretation and presentation of its details by the various narrators: in other words, from the epistemological to the discursive, and/or performative nature of the text; from its content to its style. What appeared to many early critics to be narrative confusion (not to mention authorial self-indulgence) of the first order is now more often viewed as a sophisticated dialogue on the nature of narrative itself, as represented by the articulated self-consciousness of the narrators as they attempt to make Sutpen's story "explain." The novel's indeterminacies and internal contradictions are to be accounted for by the inherent inadequacy of "realistic mimesis" (Miller 155): according to J. Hillis Miller, "Absalom, Absalom! is a novel about the failure of narration, the failure of human intentions in history, and the failure of reading to lead to clear understanding" (157).

But when Miller concedes that narrative is an "absolute demand, a demand which can never adequately be met" (169), he does more than merely confess the inevitability of the failure of mimetic representation: he implicates the critic in the hermeneutic process enacted within the text itself.

The acute self-consciousness on the part of the narrators, then, places the critic in a peculiar relationship to the text. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, who was perhaps the first critic to suspect the relevance of psychoanalytic theory (as opposed to psychoanalytic character analysis) to a reading of Absalom, describes this peculiar effect:

> the text somehow invites its readers (critics) to repeat the experience of its narrators. In order to make sense, the critics infer, speculate, invent scenes, just like the fictional narrators whose limitations they analyse. The reader is thus drawn into the chain of inferers and repeating storytellers, loses his secure position outside the text. . . . (f12)

Albeit cautiously, Rimmon-Kenan relates this phenomenon to the transference:

> The concept of transference may be a useful analogy for the kind of narration with which we are concerned, since . . . we find combined in it the notions of telling, repeating and acting out which are so central to the status of narration in

But, true to her theory, Rimmon-Kenan's critical gesture merely replicates Quentin's reading strategy. If, as she suggests, the critic is susceptible of losing her "position outside the text," arguably the position which Mr. Compson claims to occupy in relationship to the text of the past, is she then in danger of finding a position inside it? Has J. Hillis Miller, by adopting an attitude very similar to that of Jason Compson--"they dont explain and we are not supposed to know"--done exactly that? What about Rimmon-Kenan or John Irwin, whose Doubling and Incest: Repetition and Revenge is a psychoanalytic intertextual reading of The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! which reflexively, even incestuously, duplicates Quentin's heuristic narrative strategy? In other words, if Absalom, Absalom! can be considered a discourse on intertextuality, then the interesting question becomes whose discourse, whose notion of intertextuality are we speaking about?

The concept of psychoanalytic transference points very clearly to an answer: the discourse of, the desire of, the analyst. But, arguably, the analyst/critic who adopts Quentin's or his father's notion of narrative transference remains caught in the Imaginary, and therefore incestuous, register of the discourse. Mr. Compson, in answer to Quentin's question regarding Miss Rosa's choice of him as a confidante, explains the seduction of incest, of "keeping it

in the family":

> she chose you because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend Sutpen ever had in this county, and she probably believes that Sutpen may have told your grandfather something about himself and her, about that engagement which did not engage, that troth which failed to plight. Might even have told your grandfather the reason why at the last she refused to marry him. And that your grandfather might have told me and I might have told you. And so, in a sense, the affair, no matter what happens out there tonight, will still be in the family; the skeleton (if it be a skeleton) still in the closet. (AA 12-13)

Quentin's reaction, however, is to reject his father's explanation and to deduce a different motivation: "It's because she [Rosa] wants it told" (10).

By telling the story of Sutpen to Shreve, both a geographical and biological outsider, Quentin appears to have transcended the incestuous links of communication and to have established what might be considered a truly intersubjective model for intertextuality and a potential position for the critic/analyst outside the insular family. Karl Zender suggests that this model may be fashioned on the psychoanalytic encounter when he reminds us of "The relevance of a psychoanalytic model to an understanding of

Absalom, Absalom!" and then argues that "[B]y depicting a prone Quentin listening to Shreve while reliving his journey to Sutpen's Hundred, Faulkner creates an obvious parallel to the psychoanalytic situation of therapist, couch, and patient" ("Contemporary History" 136). But Zender himself casts some confusion on this analogy: Quentin's position indicates that he is the patient, but his silence is that of the analyst. In fact, as Zender indicates, Shreve plays a much more active and involved role in the re-creation of the Supten story than would a psychoanalyst, to the point that in some of the most intense passages of the novel, Shreve/Quentin/Henry/Bon merge almost into one figure:

> the two the four the two facing one another in the tomblike room: Shreve, the Canadian, the child of blizzards and of cold in a bathrobe with an overcoat above it, the collar turned up about his ears; Quentin, the Southerner, the morose and delicate offspring of rain and steamy heat in the thin suitable clothing which he had brought from Mississippi. . . . (AA 346)

This merging of identities becomes, in sections of Absalom, Absalom!, a meta-discourse on love as the purported historical love triangle of Bon, Henry, and Judith is transmuted into the love between the two contemporary narrators:

> "And now," Shreve said, "we're going to talk about love." But he didn't need to say that either

> . . . since neither of them had been thinking about anything else; all that had gone before just so much that had to be overpassed and none else present to overpass it but them, as someone always has to rake the leaves up before you can have the bonfire. That was why it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other. . . . (AA 316)

The idyllic narrative bliss suggested by the above passage is shattered by the end of the novel, but it bears examination as a model for intertextuality if only for the reason that some critics have viewed it as a model for a "fully dialogic" textual production (Brooks "Incredulous," 256). Donald Kartiganer claims as much when he says that

> The past is finally known in the dynamics of love, which becomes for Faulkner the power of the imagination to break down temporarily the fact of separation, of distance between knower and known. (165)

Karen Ramsay Johnson also argues that Quentin and Shreve "seem to transcend not only the gap between their own "secret and solitary lives" ([AA] p. 251) but also the much

greater gap between themselves and Henry and Charles" (11), but whereas Johnson notes that "Faulkner's metaphor for Quentin and Shreve's achievement is one not of incest but of marriage" (12), Dennis A. Foster reaches a different conclusion:

> Thinking . . . has become indistinguishable from talking-listening. The two exist as themselves only in the language ('free of flesh,' we are told [AA 295]), and the only past is the words in 'rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales' [AA 303]. With this doubling of Quentin and Shreve, a metaphor that has underlain every history of Sutpen's family becomes manifest: the creation of the tale depends on a speaker's desire to marry his voice to a projection of himself, the most 'pure and perfect incest.' (98)

Foster's conclusion that the narrative relationship between Quentin and Shreve is modelled on an incest metaphor explains the inevitable failure of intersubjective narrative transmission in the novel, a failure that Foster suggests is summed up in Shreve's final words to Quentin--"Why do you hate the South?"--which betray his ultimate detachment from Quentin's pain. Rather than valorizing the transferential ways of knowing in the text, Foster, like Lacan, recognizes the danger of collapsing, however temporarily, the distinctions between "knower and known":

> the discourse of the master originates in the attempt to attain the moment of absolute knowledge described by Hegel in The Phenomenology of the Mind. For Lacan such knowledge can only be illusory in that it implies an unattainable unity, that is to say, a knowledge which brings together truth and the knowing self in a unity. In Lacanian terms, unity--or the illusion of it--belongs within the realm of the imaginary and the narcissistic functions of the ego. (Sarup 41)

Shreve's detachment from Quentin's pain at the end of the novel, a detachment which is in fact imposed on him by Quentin's dismissal--"You cant understand it. You would have to be born there" (361)--may preserve him from the illusion of unity, but does it culminate, for Shreve, in a deeper understanding of the source of this pain? The desire of the analyst to occupy Shreve's position, then, can be seen to be a desire to "play a while" (AA 280) in the family tree, without incurring the heavy penalties suffered by Quentin for his close involvement with the Sutpen story. Significantly, Shreve McCannon, according to the Genealogy, is the only character in the text, with the possible exception of Jim Bond ("whereabouts unknown"), to survive its pages.

It is, in fact, the inarticulate howl of Jim Bond at the end of the novel that signals the limits of dialogism in

the text. Many critics have noted, incessantly, that Absalom, Absalom! is a novel about dialogue--about asking, about telling, about talking, about the intersubjective transmission of narrative and (sometimes) its failure. Bernhard Radloff, for example, argues that

> The narrators offer performances of the rhetoric of the heritage and in doing so they move within the circle of understanding opened up by the heritage. This dialogical structure (in Gadamer's sense) of the internal monologue of the tradition generates the movement of history which the novel enacts. There is nothing "outside" the play of language; language is not grounded in something else, in sociological facts or psychological mechanisms or whatever. But neither is the monologue of the heritage reduced to an ahistorical textual space, a move which is common to both structuralism and poststructuralism (which is what deconstruction "essentially" is). (Radloff 272)

But by ignoring the formalized limits of dialogue in the text, limits represented in language by closed doors, inarticulate howls, unreadable faces, Radloff too is in danger of an ahistorical approach to the novel. James A. Snead notes that there is a something else--not outside the language of the text, but outside its dialogic structure--when he says that "The linkage of Shreve and Quentin, while

it reveals some important truths, threatens to turn into a solipsistic or hermetic male bond that perpetuates myths of white male paranoia" (Figures 131), underscoring the privilege granted to the "white" voice, primarily the male white voice, in the novel. Mr. Compson's phrase "keeping it in the family" is revealed to be a code for the less palatable idea of keeping it in the patrician white race.

Richard Moreland, in speaking of the transferential relationship between Quentin and Henry Sutpen, explains how the dialogic project is severely constrained by modernist irony:

> if Quentin and Henry . . . do somehow confront ironically that other subjectivity which in their innocence they have previously repressed, it is not now to let that other subject speak in a different voice, but only to fixate on the scene of their own ironic discovery of the exclusion, represented here as a discovery not of particular other subjects but of their own mirror image in the form of the inescapable Other--the Other escapable only in Henry's death as in Quentin's impending suicide. As long as that other is only the Other, one can only be inside or outside the door, either father or son, either in possession or not in possession of the contested object of desire. Only when the contested object speaks

> opposition--only then can the compulsive repetition of this opposition be broken. Here that other voice might have been that liveried slave whom Sutpen meets on the threshold of the plantation. Or it might have been the voice of the sister whom Henry finds in two places at once, both inside the plantation ideal, purified and protected from Bon but also outside that same ideal, excluded and silenced as subject with Bon. Such voices are almost everywhere silent in Absalom, even though Faulkner's irony like Quentin's almost everywhere here represents their silence and the doors that repeatedly close them out. (Moreland 12)

What Radloff and Moreland point out is that, if we are to consider Absalom an exemplar of the dialogic text, we must also remember Bakhtin's phrase more or less dialogized: the dialogue in Absalom, Absalom! is restricted primarily to white males, and almost exclusively to white persons. But even when extended to the consideration of other voices--particularly but not exclusively "black" voices--the dialogue can only reproduce that subject, again in the Imaginary register, as a projection of its own fear and ignorance. While Moreland remarks the absence of the voice of the liveried slave or Henry's sister, Judith, I want to suggest that it is the ubiquitous physical presence of

Clytie, in combination with her virtual silence, which, because it marks the site of both the dialogic and hermeneutic failure in the text, also marks the limits of Faulkner's influence on Morrison and suggests one way of speaking about the intertextual relationship.

'To me he's consistent. . . . Quentin was still trying to get God to tell him why, in Absalom, Absalom! as he was in The Sound and the Fury.' (Faulkner, qtd. in Samway 191)

The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, and all the child's why's reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things, as a testing of the adult, a why are you telling me this? ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire. (Lacan, Four 214)

Maybe it's because niggers are wiser than white folks and don't bother about why you do, but only about what you do, and not so much about that. (Faulkner, "Evangeline" 585)

There is really nothing more to say--except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how. (Morrison, The Bluest Eye [3])

'When you don't understand what you are being told, don't immediately assume that you are to blame; say to yourselves--the fact that I don't understand must itself have a meaning.' (Lacan, qtd. in Tavor Bannet 12)

As many critics have noted, Absalom, Absalom! is like a detective story, but one in which the important question is not "who committed the crime" but "why" (Brown and Seton 29, emphasis added). The obsessiveness with which the narrators in the novel approach this question is so infectious that, it would appear, not even the critic escapes being drawn into the text to search for an answer. As I pointed out

earlier, Quentin's solution to the mystery of motivation in the Sutpen story involves a redefinition of subjectivity and provides an answer of sorts, but an answer which raises the additional question of how Quentin learns the information that allows him to piece together the story. Central to Quentin's discovery, I would argue, is Clytemnestra Sutpen; and central to the sustenance of the indeterminacy and plurivocality--style--of the novel is her exclusion from Quentin's definition of subjectivity and the suppression, not precisely of Clytie's words, but of her dialogized voice, in the text.

Without being accused of recurring to mimetic analysis, is it possible to ask of a text such as Absalom, in which the desire to know, the hermeneutic quest, is so patently strong a motif, why none of the characters--Rosa, Quentin, Mr. Compson--dares even to think to interrogate Clytie, the only living material witness, with the possible exception of Henry Sutpen, to almost all of the key events of Sutpen's story? At a climactic point in the novel, Shreve sums up the convoluted trajectory of Quentin's enlightenment:

> 'Your old man . . . When your grandfather was telling this to him, he didn't know any more what your grandfather was talking about than your grandfather knew what the demon was talking about when the demon told it to him, did he? And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn't have

> known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there and seen Clytie.' (AA 274)

Later, Shreve "clarifies" Clytie's importance to Quentin's discovery of the "secret" that haunts the Sutpen story:

> 'And you couldn't stop her [Clytie] either and then you saw that Clytie's trouble wasn't anger nor even distrust; it was terror, fear. And she didn't tell you in so many words because she was still keeping that secret for the sake of the man who had been her father too as well as for the sake of the family which no longer existed' (AA 350);
>
> 'and she didn't tell you in the actual words because even in the terror she kept the secret; nevertheless she told you, or at least all of a sudden you knew -- (AA 351)

As various critics point out, the narrated version of Quentin's meeting with Clytie at Sutpen's Hundred contains no explanation of the verbal or non-verbal clues that Clytie provides. From the critics' point of view, there are several possible conclusions to be drawn: 1) in an unrecorded conversation with Quentin, Clytie tells him everything she knows (which, according to critic Loren Schmidtberger, would be a great deal); 2) Clytie's appearance suggests somehow to Quentin a link in semblance between Henry Sutpen and Jim Bond, Charles Bon's grandson (Hershel Parker); 3) Quentin

bases his postulation "that Charles Bon was also Sutpen's child and that he, too, was part-negro" on "the discovery of a certain formal pattern of crossing of categories: Clytie's Sutpen face with its negro pigmentation, the very design of debacle" (Peter Brooks, "Incredulous" 259). Is it now necessary to point out that this range of alternatives is already anticipated in either one of the two reading strategies suggested by Quentin's or his father's models? Either something is missing from the text or everything that we already know about Sutpen is sufficient to know everything about him and those whose lives he affected.

While Peter Brooks argues that Clytie provides the "hermeneutic clue" that solves the riddle of Sutpen's story, I want to suggest that Clytie's role is rather that of a hermeneutic knot in the text. But it is important to see how she fulfils that role, or rather, how the narrative positions her in it. As Thomas Sutpen's illegitimate daughter, Clytie serves as Judith's black shadow or double, implicated directly by Rosa's narrative in Judith's darker nature when Clytie is discovered at Judith's side watching the brutal fights in Sutpen's barn (AA 30). Clytie's bond to the Supten family, moreover, is portrayed as a mirror image of Rosa's exclusion from it, and Clytie's loyalty to Judith and the family earns her Rosa Coldfield's life-long enmity and rivalry. Through Rosa's narrative, Faulkner establishes not only the pattern of Clytie's obstinate and

taciturn defense of the Sutpen family secrets but also her enigmatic, almost inhuman, aloofness:

> I had for company one woman [Judith] whom, for all she was blood kin to me, I did not understand . . . and another [Clytie] who was so foreign to me and to all that I was that we might have been not only of different races (which we were), not only of different sexes (which we were not), but of different species, speaking no language which the other understood, the very simple words with which we were forced to adjust our days to one another being even less inferential of thought or intention than the sounds which a beast and a bird might make to each other. (AA 153-4, italics omitted)

Rosa's painstaking discretion between Clytie's language and her own here results in an occult projection that reinforces Mr. Compson's fanciful notion that Sutpen "intended to name Clytie, Cassandra, prompted by some pure dramatic economy not only to beget but to designate the presiding augur of his own disaster" (AA 62). (Cassandra is, of course, the hostage who was cursed with always speaking the truth, never to be believed.) But Rosa's bizarre portrayal of Clytie's language, if not Clytie's inhuman physical appearance, is contradicted when Shreve narrates Quentin's youthful encounter with an already aged Clytie:

> a little dried-up woman not much bigger than a monkey and who might have been any age up to ten thousand years, in faded voluminous skirts and an immaculate headrag, her bare coffee-colored feet wrapped around the chair rung like monkeys do, smoking a clay pipe and watching you with eyes like two shoe buttons buried in the myriad wrinkles of her coffee-colored face, who just looked at you and said without even removing the pipe and in a voice almost like a white woman's: 'What do you want?' and after a moment one of you [Quentin or Luster] said 'Nothing' and then you were all running without knowing which of you began to run first nor why since you were not scared. . . . (AA 214, italics omitted)

As Quentin's apprehension of her voice suggests, Clytie Sutpen occupies the liminal space between black and white worlds, even moving and operating more or less freely between them, as when she travels to New Orleans to retrieve Charles Etienne or into town to pay for Judith's headstone. As such, she appears to operate in the text as a cipher, her being itself encoded with the mystery of Sutpen's past, her face a graphic translation of the Sutpen story, so that when Peter Brooks reads transferentially, in the pattern of her face, both incest and miscegenation, or "the very design of debacle," he is merely echoing Rosa:

> Clytie, not inept, anything but inept: perverse inscrutable and paradox: free, yet incapable of freedom who had never once called herself a slave, holding fidelity to none like the indolent and solitary wolf or bear . . . Clytie who in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were and which had made of her (Clytie) that which she declined to be. . . . (AA 156)

The idea of "reading" Clytie's face, however, in order to discover clues about the Sutpen debacle, reduces her function simply to that of cryptogram, and elevates her ontologically to the overdetermination of meaning itself. This is, in other words, no less a potentially racist move on the part of the critic than it is on the part of Rosa, insofar as it involves the repetition of a projection of [white] desire on an inarticulate surface and therefore devalues Clytie's dialogic role in the creation of the Sutpen legend. But since I have already argued that Clytie's voice is <u>not</u> dialogized in the novel, I will have to explain. I do so by referring to the very brief dialogue between Quentin and Clytie at Sutpen's Hundred:

> 'Who are you?' she said
>
> 'I'm Quentin Compson,' he answered.
>
> 'Yes. I remember your grandpaw. You go up there and make her come down. Make her go away

> from here. Whatever he done, me and Judith and him have paid it out. You go and get her. Take her away from here.' So he mounted the stairs . . . . (AA 370)

This passage is remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is its demonstration of the remarkable verbal command of an elderly, enfeebled black woman over a white youth. But there are several other important ideas contained in this short passage. First, Clytie's notice of the suffering and even the shared guilt endured, equally, by the Sutpen siblings allows her to reclaim possession of the Sutpen story for herself, as well as for Judith, Henry, and Bon. But not only does Clytie reclaim Quentin's legacy of pain from him, she also threatens to repossess his legitimate hereditary link to the past when she tells him, "I remember your grandpaw." By acknowledging an adult relationship with Quentin's revered grandfather (a relationship elsewhere alluded to by Mr. Compson), Clytie establishes a claim to authority which has the potential to eclipse Quentin's own.

Whatever else Clytie may represent in the novel, then, she represents the possibility of knowing the truth, or at least another truth, about the story of Sutpen; having been born then and there, she represents the possibility of at least narrowing the epistemological gap opened up between Quentin's and his father's models of reading. Moreover,

Clytie's words in the passage above implicate her not just as another victim of Sutpen's machinations, but as an active caretaker of and agent in the protection of the Sutpen family secret(s). As such, she operates functionally in the novel in the same way as does the closed door: behind her implacable face may lie many of the answers to Quentin's questions about the past, if he only dared to push the door open. But since Clytie is not an inanimate object, but rather a character who is portrayed as, potentially, an articulate and knowledgeable human being, she represents not only the possibility of knowing, if one "were brave enough . . . to make the rending gash" (AA 142-3, italics omitted), but also the threat of knowledge spontaneously erupting from the wrong place. Quentin's deliberate refusal to enter into a dialogue with Clytie and the further failure in the text to dialogize her voice points to an unmistakable conclusion: Absalom is not about the hermeneutical search for historical truth, but about the announcement of the end of a particular kind of history itself. Richard Moreland suggests as much when he argues that

> Absalom is usually considered Faulkner's most 'historical' novel, yet it is also first a (historiographic) study in, and study of, this modernist irony which nearly overrules the book's interest in Southern (and American) history, in favor of ahistorical, metaphysical confrontations

with the inhuman deadness of the real. (27-8)

Moreland's analysis points to the conclusion that, rather than being governed by a will-to-knowledge, the narrators of Absalom, Absalom! paradoxically reveal in themselves a will-to-ignorance. Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains the psychological foundation for this in Lacanian terms:

> If unconscious desire functions as an inherent "lack-in-being" that drives humans to seek resolutions and answers (whether in form or content) because all subjects are incomplete, those who close out any idea of an Otherness "in" consciousness must create endless ruses to convince themselves that they control their own destinies, will their own choices. Indeed, the imaginary push for a sense of Oneness is so strong that the desire not to know works in tandem with ego mortification such that belief systems, relationships with others, fantasies, language as a system (either constructed or deconstructed), material goods, children, sexual proclivities--all become grist for the denegation mill. ("Seeking" 45)

What Lacanian analysis can demonstrate, moreover, is that even the positing of Clytie's transcendant knowledge within the text, similar to a reading of her face, is just another projection or transference of the narrators/critics. What such an enormous investment truly conceals and denies is

Clytie's own lack-in-being, her own desire and will-to-knowledge: "What do you want?" she asks, to which Quentin replies, "Nothing." Mr. Compson, Quentin, Shreve, and Rosa fail to make events explain not because the past cannot be narrated, but because the narration of the past, if it is to make any sense at all, would have to include the desire and the voice and even the ignorance of a black subject whose statements, not to mention questions, will not be deciphered by those who have taken upon themselves the task of narration. Moreland's comments with regard to Jim Bond's howl apply equally to the virtual silencing of Clytie:

> They [Quentin and Shreve] have given . . . suffering a human face and vocal cords, but they have not allowed it to speak for itself: by hypostatizing and reifying it humanistically as the substance of human suffering, they have again avoided listening to recognizable, articulated, heterogeneously specific human desires, needs, and demands. (Moreland 119).

The possibility of historical reconstruction becomes blocked or, in Quentin's case, miraculously transcended, precisely at the moment at which he would otherwise have to admit the authoritative, desiring, and perhaps even dissenting, black voice into the dialogue. But because both Clytie's knowledge and her ignorance are cloaked behind the projection of an enigmatic appearance and an occulted language,

and because her response to Rosa's intrusion is depicted as such a spectacle--Clytie appears to be responsible for the torching of the Sutpen mansion with herself and Henry still in it--Faulkner's text implies that, in the context of the early twentieth century south, such an admission, rather than being dialogized, can only ever be represented graphically, apocalyptically. From this point of view, it is appropriate that the revelation of Bon's black blood is the final revelation of Quentin and Shreve's narrative, because "blackness" is not just the impediment to the marriage of Judith and Bon, it is also the bar to intersubjectivity.

It is from this point then--paradoxically from the point at which we must acknowledge the spectacular failure of an inter-racial narrative transmission in Absalom, Absalom!--that we must establish the basis for an intertextual reading between the works of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison. I have previously suggested the possibility of using a Lacanian psychoanalytic model to discuss not only the concept of intertextuality but also the relationship of the critic to Absalom, Absalom! A thoroughly "mad" text, in the sense that Shoshana Felman uses the term, Absalom aspires not only to pre-empt the critic by anticipating her role within the narrative, but to blur the very distinction that we are sometimes forced to impose between literature and criticism, a boundary which even at its most pragmatic level assumes only the 'inside-outside' distinction that we

see challenged by the rhetoric of Faulkner's text. "The specificity of [Absalom's] resistance to our reading" (Felman, Writing 254) is its announcement, in the foreclosure of mutually exclusive epistemological strategies for understanding personal history and in the exclusion of particular voices which might at least be capable of reopening the dialogue, of the impotence of a particular type of hermeneutical project.

But the critic who feels herself stranded between Quentin's theory that the production of historical meaning is never anything more than the infinite mirroring of the object represented, and Mr. Compson's theory that our distance from the past renders our attempts to reconstruct it futile, may merely be caught up in one transferential design of the text itself, which invites us to "play a while," but seemingly locks us within the very paradigms that have always already failed in the text. The neurotic bind posed by the "dual relation" of such "intersubjective introjection" is clearly indicated by Lacan:

> if one confines oneself to an imaginary relation between objects there remains only the dimension of distance to order it. . . . To make distance the sole dimension in which the neurotics' relation with the object are played out produces unsurmountable contradictions that can be read well enough both within the system and in the

> opposed direction that different authors will derive from the same metaphor to organize their perception. Too much or too little distance from the object will sometimes appear to become confused to an inextricable degree. And it is not the distance from the object, but rather its too great intimacy with the subject that seemed . . . to characterize the neurotic. (Écrits 246-7)

As many critics have remarked, the two poles that mark "distance" in Absalom, Absalom! are incest and miscegenation --absolute sameness and absolute difference, precisely the terms implied by the metaphors used by Quentin and his father to describe historical reconstruction and intersubjectivity. Fear of both incest and miscegenation figures literally in the text as a potential barrier to the marriage between Judith and Charles Bon, but incest and miscegenation also figure metaphorically as genuine barriers to narrative transmission:

> Incest and miscegenation, sameness and difference, here as elsewhere in the narrative--including, notably, the working out of Sutpen's design--fail to achieve a pattern of significant interweaving, and give instead a situation of paradox and impossibility: for instance, the nigger/brother conundrum that can be solved only by a pistol shot. (Brooks, "Incredulous Narration" 266)

The paradox is perhaps not surprising when we consider that the governing metaphor for both incest and miscegenation is genealogical and involves a narcissistic search for a pure identity or origin, a "keeping it in (or out) of the family." But it is a paradox only insofar as the axes of fear marked incest and miscegenation revolve around the repression of internal difference and a misrecognition of the subject's lack-in-being:

> Lacan postulated that both cultural and subjec(tive) "knowledge" organize themselves around four principles: a fundamental taboo against incest between child and mother; a real void at the center of being caused by the fact that loss lies at the heart of consciousness; "objects" of desire that compensate for a primordial and incomprehensible sense of loss; and later efforts to attenuate the experience of loss by clinging to the language and identity myths that constitute subjecthood. (Ragland-Sullivan, "Seeking" 42)

It is by applying the last principle to the narrative models proposed by Quentin and his father that we can see how an entirely motivated, wilful ignorance, or méconnaissance, governs their hermeneutical quest.

Indeed, Lacan would suggest that the quest itself, including that embarked upon by the critic to make meaning of the text of Absalom, Absalom!, arises from the ego's need

to repress "Otherness":

> It is not surprising that Lacan would describe ego closure, quests for meaning, the search for final solutions as necessary attempts to close out the Other, whose interference in conscious life is felt in a range of affects, including anxiety, confusion, frustration. That subjects would combat this "enemy within" by denying its existence through acts of religious faith or by undermining meaning itself through skeptical theories or pluralistic panoplies of varied sorts is not surprising. Whether motivated at the individual or group level, the goal of imaginary perception is to reject Otherness thus affirming by denial. Moreover, to eradicate the uncertainty and instability introduced by others, the signifier tu, human subjects tend to avoid, ignore, or, at the limit, annihilate said others. (Ragland-Sullivan, "Seeking" 51)

In a passage that is an uncannily appropriate description of the narrative design(s) of Absalom, Absalom!, Ragland-Sullivan spells out the consequences of repression and méconnaissance:

> Repression keeps people from being psychotic, from being swallowed by their Other discourse, and allows an economy of psychic drive based on not

> knowing. But repression also exacts a price. The ego is a repressive formation whose structure places a paradox at the heart of desire. Narcissistic smugness or aggressive retaliation are so basic to human mentality that no moral or political solution can finally prevent all violence, aggression, or injustice. The power of méconnaissance, whose goal is to close out knowledge of lack, cannot but cause humans to function in terms of the three passions Lacan attributes to this structure: love (idealization), hate (denigration), and ignorance (believing that what one knows is what there is to know). ("Seeking" 52)

In Absalom, Absalom!, all three passions associated with méconnaissance clearly operate at the level of character, manifest themselves at the narrative level, and are repeated in much of the criticism of the text as, at each level, the demand to "know"--and, more specifically, the demand to "know why"--is repeatedly met by a provisional understanding which is, in effect, no more nor less than the denial of a radical (internal) Otherness. As illustrated in the example of Clytie above, ignorance is maintained by characters /narrators/critics, not by the intransigence of the "Other" to the demand, but by a premature foreclosure of an intersubjective communication--dialogue--which, according to the ego-ideal, threatens to shatter the imaginary perception of

"a sense of Oneness."

Clearly, then, there are long and significant passages in Absalom, Absalom! in which difference, particularly racial difference, is obscured and occulted, and identity and identification play the paramount role in moving along narrative disclosure. Moreover, there are explicit and implicit governing models for the hermeneutical nature of such narrative transmission. But just as important, there are moments in the text which imagine alternatives to the inexorable, teleological push toward meaning. One such moment is the description by Quentin's father, here even more baffled than ever, of the hand-to-hand transmission of a letter between Judith Sutpen and Quentin's grandmother:

> this letter, this first direct word from Bon in four years and which, a week after [Judith] buried him, too, beside her mother's tombstone, she brought to town herself, in the surrey drawn by the mule . . ., and gave to your grandmother, bringing the letter voluntarily to your grandmother, who (Judith) never called on anyone now, had no friends now, doubtless knowing no more why she chose your grandmother to give the letter to than your grandmother knew. . . . (AA 126)

Jason Compson tells how his mother's surprised exclamation--"Me? You want me to keep it?"--was met by Judith's indifferent, "'Yes . . . or destroy it. As you like. Read

it if you like or dont read it if you like'" (AA 127). The rest of Judith's reply has been memorialized in criticism: her notice of individual figures attempting to weave distinct patterns on a loom has been seen as a self-reflexive representation of the inevitability of the failure of Sutpen's single-minded and egotistical design, as well as the confusion of the competing and conflicting narrative voices in the novel. But instead of examining these aspects, I wish to discuss the nature of Judith's act of transmitting the letter as well as the appearance and content of the letter itself to see if these can tell us anything about the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison.

Judith concludes her speech about the loom by commenting:

> 'And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something--a scrap of paper--something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another. . . .' (AA 127)

Quentin's grandmother, baffled by the apparent nihilism in Judith's speech but compelled to respond, to make the words

mean something, interprets Judith's despair as a confession of impending suicide. But Judith rejects this interpretation, robbing Mrs. Compson even of the satisfaction of such a cliched plot: "No. Not that. Women dont do that for love. I dont even believe that men do" (AA 128). Instead, she leaves Mrs. Compson with a document, "at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once . . ." (AA 127).

What Judith gives to this virtual stranger is a document which Quentin's father, when he in turn passes it on to Quentin, repeatedly calls a letter, but which, shorn of "date or salutation or signature" (AA 129), might be more properly termed the impersonation of a letter, a forgery. Why? Because no matter how hard Quentin's father labors to contextualize the document--"there were other letters, gallant flowery indolent frequent and insincere" (AA 128)-- and invest it with significance--"But keeping this one . . . considering this one worthy to give a stranger to keep or not to keep, even to read or not to read" (AA 129)--the letter itself refuses to do anything but announce its own status as a detour: it is a virtual record of thwarted intentions, missed encounters, and deflected desire.

In the text of this letter, the anonymous correspondent self-reflexively describes not just the conditions under which the document was produced, but the conditions which allowed, even required, its production:

> you now hold in your hands--a sheet of notepaper with, as you can see, the best of French watermarks dated seventy years ago, salvaged (stolen if you will) from the gutted mansion of a ruined aristocrat; and written upon in the best of stove polish manufactured not twelve months ago in a New England factory. Yes. Stove polish. We captured it: a story in itself. (AA 129)

The story is of another raid, conducted by starving Confederate soldiers in search of ammunition, to say nothing of food, on "ten plump defenseless sutlers' wagons" whose payload proves to be not guns or food, but "Gallons and gallons and gallons of the best stove polish . . . doubtless still trying to overtake General Sherman with some belated amended field order requiring him to polish the stove before firing the house" (AA 130). The absurdity and even irony of their discovery is not lost on the starving soldiers, although the writer bravely converts the misfortune into an opportunity to narrate the story and to communicate a message: "We have waited long enough" (AA 131). Even this promise, of course, proves to be empty: the reunion of the letter writer and his addressee is apparently never realized.

The disappointing substitutions of stove polish for food, of letter for substance, must make the reader of Absalom aware of yet another level of irony at which "Bon's letter" serves to describe the disappointments and failures

of all of those characters in the novel who try, in one way or another, to feed on the meaning of the past, only to come away filled with words but still starving. The document points to the way desire and displacement operate in the text to confound the narrators of Sutpen's story, but it also points to another way of reading the novel. Based on his reading of the letter, David Krause calls Absalom a "pensive" text, citing Roland Barthes' definition in S/Z:

> For if the classic text has nothing more to say than what it says, at least it attempts to "let it be understood" that it does not say everything; this allusion is coded by pensiveness, which is a sign of nothing but itself: as though having filled the text but fearing that it is not incontestably filled, the discourse insisted on supplementing it with an et cetera of plenitudes. . . . At its discreet urging, we want to ask the classic text: What are you thinking about? but the text, wilier than all those who try to escape by answering: about nothing, does not reply, giving meaning its last closure: suspension. (239)

As Krause points out in a footnote and as I pointed out earlier in this chapter, the categories of "readerly" and "writerly" may be used to describe ways of reading rather than the status of texts themselves. Absalom may be read, as Mr. Compson suggests, to make the past explain, or it may

be read, as Quentin believes, to make one's life explain. What Bon's "letter" and Barthes' theory suggest, however, is that Absalom may be read to refuse our demand, to sustain our desire, and therefore to suspend itself not above or outside (literary) history, but firmly within its possibilities.

What I am suggesting, of course, is that the "style" of Absalom, as it is represented in the displacements and diversions of what critics refer to as "Bon's letter," can lead us to some understanding of the nature of the inter-textual relationship between Toni Morrison and William Faulkner. But since we have seen that, according to many critics, "style" alone fails to account for any notion of political pressure between texts or any sense of oppositional discourse, it is necessary to put still more pressure on both the notion of writerliness and our reading of the letter.

First, Barbara Johnson clarifies the political connotations of "writerliness":

> If writerliness cannot be set up as an ultimate value without neutralizing itself, it nevertheless seems to stand as the unbypassable site of the penultimate--the place where a new passage through otherness can be opened up, and only if one is attempting to follow an imperative not to stop there. It would thus probably never be false to

> say that to privilege writerliness is conservative--though I'm not sure it would always be true--but writerliness itself is conservative only in the sense that it is capable of inscribing and conserving messages the radicality of which may not yet have been explored. (31)

While Johnson seems to imply that the "writerly" text, or a text which may be read as such, is like a time capsule which contains encoded messages to be read at some time when they may be understood, we must not then assume that Bon's letter, or by extension Absalom, or any other "writerly" text for that matter, simply awaits some future date at which time its meaning will be transparent to more enlightened minds. Rather we must heed Johnson's warning that the writerly text marks "the place where a new passage through otherness can be opened up, and only if one is attempting to follow an imperative not to stop there." Is this "path" not also what Lacan refers to as a "style"? And just as Lacan insists on the unanswerability of style, Barthes insists, too, that the text will not answer, either now or to posterity. What, then, is conserved? To answer that question, we need to examine the letter again, to discover in it a further displacement: the substitution of stove polish for ink.

I have suggested that Bon's letter is a "forgery," and I would like to add that its status as a forgery is

further substantiated by the nature of this subetitution. In fact, the letter writer's clever improvisation enables us to "read" into his text not only the absurdity of the search for meaning, but also the implications of the specular construction of identity. Shorn of date, greeting, and signature, the "letter" obviously escapes the authorizing economy and drive of the text, but, in the substitution of stove polish for ink, it also both elicits and escapes its scopic impulses: while the writer scrupulously draws attention to the visual appearance of the object at hand and the medium in which he writes, so much so that the letter and its promise appear almost to be an excuse to declaim the fortuitous discovery of stove polish, that medium itself represents merely the "scratch" on paper that is indistinguishable from black ink. But if, on paper, "blackness" is "blackness," as I have just suggested, then the substitution may be evocative for other reasons.

In a text which so obsessively strains to "see" blackness in the pigmentation of flesh, the letter-writer self-consciously heralds his own trick, his <u>tromp l'oeil</u>, in the substitution of "blacking" for "real" ink. Seen in this way, the medium itself <u>does</u> communicate a message, even a prophecy:

> since because within this sheet of paper you now hold the best of the old South which is dead, and the words you read were written upon it with the

> best (each box said, the very best) of the new North which has conquered and which therefore, whether it likes it or not, will have to survive, I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live. (AA 131-2)

What the letter perhaps demonstrates and foretells is the "blacking" of America, literally a specular inversion of the "vision" with which Shreve threatens Quentin at the end of the novel: "I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won't be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won't show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond" (AA 378). But heeding Johnson's warning "not to stop there," I would suggest that we consider how the letter mocks the paranoia induced in Quentin by Shreve's vision, and exposes the charade of racial identity. For the first, and perhaps only, time in the novel, Quentin can neither <u>see</u> nor clearly visualize who is speaking to him, and what emerges from his reading is pure, but not transcendant, voice:

> he read the faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he

> looked at it and which might fade, vanish, at any instant while he still read; the dead tongue speaking after the four years and then after almost fifty more, gentle sardonic whimsical and incurably pessimistic. . . . (AA 129)

Bon's racial identity, like the letter itself, written by Bon or not, to Judith or not, may be apocryphal, but his disembodied voice, preserved in Judith's act of transmitting the letter, permits "blackness" to speak and, more importantly, to be heard. Ironically, then, it is the "writerly" text, the text that not only draws attention to itself as written, but confesses to being written only because the materials for its production came unexpectedly (and, in a sense, unfortuitously) to hand, that paradoxically effaces its visual status and demands to be heard, rather than seen.

In this "penultimate" passage then, Faulkner opens up "a new passage through otherness," a "style," in the form of a detour around the scopic impulse that is repeatedly blocked elsewhere in the text. It might be argued, of course, that this passage leads nowhere: after all, even the letter writer apparently fails to fulfil his promise, and neither Quentin's grandmother, his father, nor Quentin himself is able to use the letter as a tool for unlocking the secrets of the past. But this failure on the part of the letter to communicate anything more than a voice may be precisely the point at which communication is opened up, if

not fully achieved. Implying as it does the passage from the specular to the aural, from the Imaginary to the Symbolic, my reading of Quentin's reading of the letter suggests the possibility of an intertextual relationship between the works of Faulkner and Morrison that not only acknowledges the liabilities of the gaze alone for establishing intersubjective communication, but is underwritten by Morrison's appeal to Faulkner's texts to continue to imagine new ways of producing knowledge of the other.

As soon as I desire I am asking to be considered. I am not merely here-and-now, sealed into thingness. I am for somewhere else and for something else. I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I pursue something other than life; insofar as I do battle for the creation of a human world--that is, of a world of reciprocal recognitions. (Fanon 218)

The text you write must prove to me that it desires me. This proof exists: it is writing. (Barthes 6)

Whether the teacher professes to be in possession of knowledge or of ignorance, the student learns from whatever the teacher is not in possession of. (Barbara Johnson, A World 85)

So far I have suggested that to imagine an intertextual relationship between the works of Toni Morrison and William Faulkner, we must first acknowledge the specular bias in Faulkner's portrayal of African-Americans, and particularly in his portrayal of the African-American woman in Absalom, Absalom!, as well as the motivated suppression of the black dialogic voice in the text. But in the previous chapter I also concurred with Craig Werner that African-American writers such as Toni Morrison "continue to find [Faulkner]

worth arguing with," by noting that Faulkner's writing appears to escape the censure, if that is not too strong a word, that Morrison's Playing in the Dark reserves most notably for Ernest Hemingway. Extrapolating from Morrison's comments regarding Hemingway, I suggested that what this might indicate is that Faulkner's "need, desire, or awareness of [African-Americans] either as readers of his work or as people existing" merits not only some exemption for Faulkner from Morrison's discussion of the impoverishing effects of racial stereotyping in literature, but also places Faulkner's literary work in a reciprocal, if complicated, relationship with that of Morrison. While Faulkner's engagement with what Morrison calls an "Africanist presence" or "persona," according to my reading of Absalom, Absalom!, is at times limited and almost always equivocal, the extent of that engagement clearly indicates an enormous "need, desire, or awareness" on his part, such that the potential for dialogue clearly exists.

I have further cast this engagement into a psychoanalytic model and have suggested that the intertextual relationship between Morrison and Faulkner might be said to take the form of the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter, in which the transference--that of both the analyst and analysand--plays an important role, but in which the recognition and overcoming of transference relationships determines the successful outcome of analysis. What this

entails, from a Lacanian perspective, is the transmission of a "style" which announces itself as a true originality insofar as originality is a "reflexive movement [which], in returning to and upon itself, in effect subverts itself --finds something other than what it had expected, what it had set out to seek; the way in which the answer is bound in effect to displace the question; the way in which what is revolving, what returns to itself, radically displaces the very point of observation" (Felman, Jacques Lacan 67). Lacan has suggested that this "pass" occurs at the end of an analysis in

> the passage of a true speech, which joins the subject to an other subject (rather than an objectified other), on the other side of the wall of language. It is the ultimate relation [la relation dernière] of the subject to a true Other, to the Other who gives a response that one does not expect, which defines the terminal point of analysis. (qtd. in Clark 36)

Ironically, then, the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison is based not on identification, but on alienation, the condition which, despite Lacan's misrepresentation by some American critics, "pervades Lacan's entire system" (Tavor Bannet 15). Intersubjectivity, for Lacan and for this intertextual study, is profoundly connected with the passage from the gaze to the voice, from seeing and

being seen to the possibility of speaking and being heard, with the added proviso that, for Lacan, "there is always the point at which the listener decides what the speaker wants to say" (Sarup 78). To listen, for Lacan, is to hear what is not spoken, to reply not with an answer, but with the words of the "Other" in full speech.

While it may be argued that a psychoanalytic approach to the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison privileges Eurocentric ways of knowing and describing subjectivity, in Playing in the Dark Morrison herself suggests not only the importance of a psychoanalytic approach to reading literature, but a way of translating the psychoanalytic idiom into an African-American context. In her preface to the book, Morrison describes her encounter with the autobiography of Marie Cardinal. What intrigues Morrison most about Cardinal's book, which "document[s] her madness, her therapy, and the complicated process of healing in language" (v), is Cardinal's description of "the specular even spectacular scene that convinced her that she was in danger of collapse" (vi), a moment which occurs as Cardinal, a white Algerian, listens to a live performance of Louis Armstrong's jazz band. Whatever connections there may actually have been between Cardinal's recognition of her madness and the jazz performance--and these, apparently, are not explicitly addressed in the autobiography--Morrison sees in Cardinal's admission just one example of the profound

psychological response of the white "colonizer" to "black" expressive forms. By explicitly associating her own work with such African-American expressive forms as jazz music, the blues, and gospel, as we shall see in the next chapter, Morrison not only seeks to place her work within a cultural matrix that resonates for both white- and African-Americans, she also suggests that her work has the potential to engage white cultural subjects and texts with a style which is capable of unsettling the psychological defenses of the ego.[19]

The link I am proposing between African-American literary and musical forms has, of course, been previously theorized in the work of Houston A. Baker, Jr. in Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory. But rather than elaborating on Baker's idea that the blues define an exclusively African-American aesthetic, I want to suggest that African-American gospel, blues, and jazz form part of a wider signifying culture and that their "vernacular" can be employed strategically and to different effect in the works of both white- and African-American writers. In other words, I do not wish to propose a displacement of essentialism "from sight to sound" (Fuss 90), that is, from the signification of skin color to the signification of vernacular as an intrinsic racial characteristic, but rather a way of exploring the "junction where . . . texts, norms, and values meet and work upon each other" (Iser 216-17). In particular, jazz, with its

emphasis on both repetition and innovation, translates the idiom of the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter into a cultural space shared, but inhabited differently by, Morrison and Faulkner.

NOTES

[1] "They all talked at once, their voices insistent and contradictory and impatient, making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words" (Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury 72).

[2] Although Bakhtin distinguishes the "dialogic" from the "monologic" text, privileging the former, virtually synonymous with the novel form, as a site of ultimate "heterogeneity," he anticipates later developments in discourse theory that, by refusing the unity of the subject, theorize the inevitable heterogeneity of all utterance. We can see this tendency in Bakhtin's own words: "The dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse, creates the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel" (275); "The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it--it does not approach the object from the sidelines" (276-7).

[3] Barthes' categorization of "readerly" and "writerly" texts is similarly and perhaps too inevitably susceptible to a post-structuralist revision which collapses the distinctions between the two terms. Barthes even demonstrates this in his reading of Balzac's "Sarrasine."

[4] See Hoffman and Vickery (1-50), O.B. Emerson, and R. P. Warren (esp. 276-8, 289-90) for early negative reviews of the novel. See Bassett for more favorable early reviews.

[5] See Rollyson for a historiographical analysis of Absalom, Absalom! I cannot agree, however, with Rollyson's implicit assertion in "Absalom, Absalom!: The Novel as Historiography" that Quentin and Shreve construct a "truer" version of the Sutpen affair than do the other narrators and that they are therefore better historiographers.

[6] See particularly John Irwin.

[7] e.g. R. G. Collingwood. The work of Louis O. Mink and Harden White epitomizes this type of historiographical analysis in the late twentieth Century. Dominica LaCapra supplements the notion of historiography with concepts, such as the transference, from psychoanalytic theory.

[8] In fact, in at least one way, Quentin's death is not subsequent to his role in Absalom, but rather prior to it, as Faulkner's "mistake" in the Chronology--placing Quentin and Rosa's visit to Sutpen's Hundred in December 1910, six months after Quentin's suicide--indicates.

[9] Seminar II (1954-55): Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse. Ed. Jacques Alain-Miller. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978. 287-88.

[10] Morrison has admitted to having very little musical background, but says that she was constantly exposed to music as child: "I can't play any musical instruments and I can't sing, but my mother and my aunts play and sing all the time. . . . So . . . I heard it all the time" (Jones and Vinson, "Interview" 139). Similarly, Faulkner's interest in music was primarily aesthetic, rather than technical. Meta Carpenter Wilde, Faulkner's lover and a serious pianist, describes him as "the writer tone-deaf to the thunderous miracle of music" (69).

CHAPTER THREE: SONG OF ABSALOM AND BLUES EYES:

'SOMETHING ROGUE'[1] IN THE MUSIC OF INTERTEXTUALITY

One can argue--without qualifying one's admiration for Morrison's talent and originality--that her themes of history, identity, and freedom deserve consideration as something more than the self-absorbed, even solipsistic expression of black desire. They deserve consideration as part of a dialogue or intertextual engagement with certain literary precursors, among the most important of whom are Faulkner and Joyce. (Cowart [87])

Grounded in Faulkner, and informed by James Baldwin's densely lyrical experiments with a fictional prose rooted in the religious vernacular (the spirituals and gospel music, King Jamesian biblical cadences and allusions, the spoken black prophetic voice (as well as jazz, blues, and the whole range of Black secular vernacular speech rituals and discourses, Morrison has evolved a register of representation that we might think of as a magical naturalism. (Gates and Appiah ix)

She ate Faulkner for a snack. (Leonard 37)

I am not <u>like</u> Faulkner. I am not <u>like</u> in that sense. I do not have objections to being compared to such extraordinarily gifted and facile writers, but it does leave me sort of hanging there when I know that my effort is to <u>like</u> something that has probably only been fully expressed perhaps in music. . . . The only analogy I have for it is in music. John Coltrane does not sound like Louis Armstrong, and no one ever confuses one for the other, and no one questions if they are black. That is what I am trying to get at, but I don't have the vocabulary to explain it better. It can be copied, just like the music can be copied. But once one has it, it is distinguishable and therefore recognizable for itself. (Morrison, Interview by McKay 408, 409)

The analogy that occurs to me is jazz: it is open on the one hand and both complicated and inaccessible on the other. I never asked Tolstoy to write for me, a little colored girl in Lorain, Ohio. I never asked Joyce not to mention Catholicism or the world of Dublin. Never. And I don't know why I should be asked to explain your life to you . . . Faulkner wrote what I suppose could be called regional literature and had it published all over the world. It is good--and universal--because it is specifically about a particular world. (Morrison in Leclair and Morrison 374)

With just a few exceptions,[2] comparisons made between the work of Toni Morrison and that of William Faulkner remain undeveloped and mostly impressionistic; in other words, these comparisons have either been based on claims of stylistic similarity or have arisen as mysterious non-sequitors. Edna O'Brien's criticism of Jazz provides the best example of the latter type of commentary:

> Do I miss something [in Jazz]? Yes, I miss the emotional nexus, the moment shorn of all artifice that brings us headlong into the deepest recesses of feeling, moments such as in Faulkner's "Light in August," when the fugitive Joe Christmas takes to the road knowing that it will run on forever "between the savage and spurious board fronts of oil towns." (51)

The value of such a comparison, I think, is suspect, if only because it occludes the assumptions upon which critical judgement is based. What does O'Brien mean by an "emotional nexus"? Why is the short, highly wrought Faulknerian phrase she quotes more deeply satisfying than, for example, the following passage from Jazz:

> Finally [Violet] sat on the bed to unwind her hair. Most of the knots fixed that morning had loosened under her head cloth and were now cupfuls of soft wool her fingers thrilled to. Sitting there, her hands deep in the forbidden pleasure of

> her hair, she noticed she had not removed her heavy work shoes. Putting the toe of her left foot to the heel of her right, she pushed the shoe off. The effort seemed extra and the mild surprise at how very tired she felt was interrupted by a soft, wide hat, as worn and dim as the room she sat in, descending on her. Violet did not feel her shoulder touch the mattress. Way before that she had entered a safe sleep. Deep, trustworthy, feathered in colored dreams. The heat was relentless, insinuating. Like the voices of the women in houses nearby singing "Go down, go down, way down in Egypt land . . ." Answering each other from yard to yard with a verse or its variation. (225-[226])

I am not suggesting, of course, that I wish to pit my aesthetic judgement against that of O'Brien by confessing that I find the above passage by Morrison more moving or more affecting than the particular Faulknerian line she quotes. I would, however, argue that this type of affective criticism merely begs the question of aesthetic merit that O'Brien wishes to address in her review, without advancing our understanding of Morrison's status vis-à-vis Faulkner or any of the other writers to whom O'Brien compares her.

My choice of the above passage in Morrison's Jazz is motivated by more than just aesthetic concerns, however:

the lyrics that drift through the air and lull young Violet to sleep are of course from the spiritual, "Go Down, Moses," but they also suggest the title of a Faulkner novel. So while my theoretical approach to the intertextual relationship between Faulkner and Morrison is psychoanalytic, I will in this chapter organize the exploration of this relationship around the language of and in music. When Morrison says "I am not like Faulkner," and yet continually claims for her work an affinity with music, she invites us to speculate on an intertextuality that partakes of a wider cultural context and which operates somewhat like the "riffing" of a jazz piece. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. suggests as much when he links the work of Morrison, Faulkner, and Duke Ellington:

> Like William Faulkner, whose work was the subject of Toni Morrison's master's thesis at Cornell and whose finest work comes to mind again and again as we read through Jazz, Morrison's new novel serves to redefine the very possibilities of narrative point of view. Like Duke Ellington, Morrison has found a way, paradoxically, to create an ensemble of improvised sound out of a composed music. Riffing on these two great geniuses of American literature and music, Toni Morrison has established herself as one of the truly original novelists at work in the world today. ("Review" 55)

Of course, Gates takes his cue from Morrison herself, who insistently and repeatedly describes her own work in terms of music, and particularly jazz:

> Classical music satisfies and closes. Black music does not do that. Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. There may be a long chord, but no final chord. And it agitates you. Spirituals agitate you, no matter what they are saying about how it is all going to be. There is something underneath them that is incomplete. There is always something else that you want from the music. I want my books to be like that--because I want the feeling of something held in' reserve and the sense that there is more--that you can't have it all right now. . . . That is a part of what I want to put in my books. They will never fully satisfy--never fully. (Interview by McKay 411)

Just as Morrison feels that with Faulkner, "there is always something to surface," she senses in jazz music an analogy to her own work as indeterminate, or as having submerged potential: "There is something underneath them that is incomplete." But jazz is also an intersubjective music form: alternately listening and playing, repeating and improvising, jazz performers essentially recreate the inter-textuality of the Lacanian analytic situation, in which "the

analyst returns to the subject what the subject was saying so that the subject can recognize it and stop saying it" (Sarup 88). Even the jazz solo "quotes" frequently from the canon. Like a Lacanian session, the jazz session suspends and violates conventional notions of marked time and the impulse toward symmetry. Like that of the jazz session, the economy of the Lacanian session is circulatory and infinite, tentative rather than teleological. And just as each jazz session begins anew while conserving and retaining previous structures and phrases, so does the psychoanalytic session. Madan Sarup describes how we might mediate between jazz and Lacanian theory by considering the origins of Lacan's notion of "full speech" in Heideggerian thought:

> Heidegger makes an important distinction between authentic and inauthentic forms of existential discourse. The authentic form he calls 'Saying.' This he identifies with our ability to <u>listen</u> and thus genuinely respond to the voice of Being. The inauthentic form he calls idle talk, which he goes on to define as opinionated chatter unmindful of human Being. (54)

To this, we might add Daniel Gunn's emphasis on the act of "listening" in both psychoanalysis and reading:

> If there is a 'truth' of psychoanalysis, I have suggested, it is ultimately an unconscious truth. This means, of course, that such truth, while it

> can be sought, cannot rightly be 'discovered,' in the way that treasure chests or gold nuggets are discovered. It cannot be known, retained, and then recycled. It can only be uttered, only encountered. It is less heard than overheard. (217)

What occurs between the texts of Morrison and Faulkner, I will argue in this chapter and the next, is a form of 'Saying' the 'Other' in full speech, as Lacan defines full speech as "ceas[ing] to speak of oneself as an object" (Sarup 55). By looking at the way both Faulkner and Morrison use the lyrics of the "blues" and African-American spirituals in their work and by looking at the way that the relationship between certain texts is characterized by a "jazz" economy, which is, of course, also a Lacanian economy in which the metonymy of desire fuels circulation, I hope to demonstrate that Morrison is absolutely correct when she says she is not <u>like</u> Faulkner in the sense of sharing with him an aesthetic identity. Rather, her works speak to and with those of Faulkner in something like the language of one musician <u>listening to</u> and <u>speaking with</u> another, the style of each "distinguishable" and "recognizable," but in conversation nonetheless. Moreover, I want to suggest that Morrison's insistence on appropriating musical models when forced to confront questions of influence and intertextuality, particularly as these questions pertain to connections with Faulkner, points to a something beyond

speech--"something rogue"--in much the same way that Lacanian psychoanalysis is oriented toward the ineffability of the Real.

While my elaboration of the jazz analogy initially suggested by Morrison and confirmed by many of her critics provides an intriguing heuristic model for writing and intertextuality, however, I must clarify here as well the limitations for its use in my study and qualify the status of music itself in psychoanalytic theory. Kaja Silverman notes that music--or more precisely non-vocative, rhythmic sound--is more closely associated with the pre-Oedipal stage of human development and with "infantile pleasure" (96) than with the Symbolic. As such, music may be seen to have a "lulling" or pacifying effect on the subject that would seem to nullify its potential for meaningful communication. But if music is associated with the maternal voice, then by analogy, as Silverman implies in her critique of the Kristevan chora as a "regressive fantasy" (124)--that is, an Imaginary site that is retroactively constructed from the place of the Symbolic--it may also play a similar role to that of the maternal voice in "inaugurating desire" (137). Lacan theorizes that it is the mother's speech, or more precisely the expression of her desire for the father--"the link of love and respect, by which the mother does or does not put the father in his ideal place" (Écrits 218)--that produces the paternal metaphor which governs entry into the

Symbolic and therefore establishes the child's relationship to desire.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, then, music already has an ambivalent signifying potential which can only be magnified and complicated by its incorporation into the discursive form of the novel. For the purposes of this study, however, I am less interested in pursuing the more technical or stylistic contributions of music per se to the works of Morrison and Faulkner, than in locating moments of orality/aurality which serve to rupture the closed economy of the gaze: what intrigues me is that these moments in both Faulkner and Morrison are often connected to song, particularly gospel or blues. But rather than generalizing here regarding the effects of such moments, I will insist on the potential of both authors to employ music and song strategically; I will insist, in other words, on the importance of determining the specifity of the utterance.

While the advantage of using the Lacanian/jazz model to discuss Morrison and Faulkner is that it exempts me from employing developmental and teleological strategies to compare their works, I feel that I must say something about Morrison's early critical work on Faulkner as a means of introducing themes that are important not just to all of Morrison's work so far, but also to her interest in exploiting musical forms. What we may detect by looking at Morrison's early obsession with the questions of isolation

and alienation is an attempt to work through the signifying language of the blues to the rhythmically intertextual space of jazz.

Morrison's Masters Thesis, "Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner's Treatment of Alienation," presented in 1955, is a relatively short and concise comparison of Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! In this thesis, Morrison argues that, for Woolf, isolation and alienation are endemic to humanity's existential state, whereas in the two examples of Faulkner's work, isolation is the tragic choice of flawed heroes such as Quentin Compson and Thomas Sutpen. She concludes the thesis by saying,

> The dissimilarity between these authors' treatments of the alienated is even more striking when it is realized that they agree on the answer to the questions of death, life, time and morality--that honesty and self-knowledge are essential to understanding these enigmas--but they disagree on the method by which the individual arrives at the solutions. (39)

While the thesis clearly predates Morrison's career as a writer of fiction, it would not be remiss, I think, to argue that the question--and I mean that term in its most inconclusive sense--of alienation posed in it is one that pervades all of her subsequent work. Moreover, as she

herself used the treatment of alienation to distinguish and compare the work of Faulkner and Woolf, so too may we find the treatment of alienation a basis for comparison between Faulkner and Morrison.

In her thesis, Morrison casts the larger themes of Faulkner's work in the light of Classical tragedy:

> In these novels the background is embellished with elements of Greek tragedy and the action follows that classic pattern. The fall of a once great house; old family guilts inherited by an heir; the conflict between individual will and fate and the self-wrought catastrophe of the protagonist are all immediately recognized traits in Greek tragedy. (24)

But what Morrison's thesis, with its emphasis on the Classical model, does not consider is the cultural alienation either specifically of women or of African-Americans in a patriarchal and racist society. In a discussion given over entirely to the self-imposed isolation and alienation of certain characters, for example, Morrison does not mention the putatively self-imposed isolation of Judith, Clytie, and Rosa during the war, never mind the much longer and strictly enforced isolation of Clytie and Jim Bond after Judith's death.

Morrison not only overlooks the other suicide in Absalom, Absalom!--Clytie--but she appears also to have

overlooked Clytie's role as a motivated actor in the Sutpen drama when she says this of African-American characters in Faulkner's work:

> Those capable of restoring the order needed are the Negroes, like Dilsey, who "endured," but it is only those who have incurred the guilt who have the right to expiate it. (35)

None of this need surprise us, given the nature of Morrison's project and the nature of the academy at the time. Indeed, Morrison's oversight merely supports her later theory expressed in Playing in the Dark and elsewhere that, until recently, African-Americans have truly been "invisible," even to other African-Americans, in "white" American literature. Mae Gwendolyn Harrison explains:

> Speaking both to and from the position of the other(s), black women writers must, in the words of Audre Lorde, deal not only with "the external manifestations of racism and sexism," but also "with the results of those distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another" ["Eye to Eye" in Sister Outsider" 147]. (19)

But if, as John N. Duvall claims, Morrison's "thesis stands as a piece of intellectual autobiography that provides a glimpse into the development of her artistic imagination" ("Doe Hunting" 96), then we must perhaps look beyond the

oversights in this early critical work to discover the basis of a potentially revisionary mode of reading/constructing black subjectivity.

In an interview with Bessie Jones and Audrey Vinson, Morrison suggests that the Classical model she employed in her analysis of Faulkner's work may provide just such a basis. In response to the question, "Do you see any relationship between Greek tragedy and the Black experience?", Morrison replies:

> there was something about the Greek chorus . . . that reminds me of what goes on in Black churches and in jazz where there are two things. You have a response obviously. The chorus being the community who participates in this behavior. . . . (134, emphasis added)

By envisioning an aesthetic link between the culture of her own black community, which, Morrison says, she was hardly aware of as a unique cultural force until after leaving Cornell, and the chorus of Greek tragedy, Morrison suggests the potential for a double-voiced discourse that not only operates internally, in her own creative work, but that also has the potential for resonating between her work and that of other writers. Moreover, Morrison suggests that, underlying and perhaps mitigating the alienation inherent in the tragic elements of her own and Faulkner's work is an aural alterity that can potentially, at times, break through, if

not break down, the barriers of isolation imposed by the individual's Imaginary, specular, relationship to "otherness." Since she does not focus at all on black characters in her thesis, we can only speculate that Morrison may have sensed such a potential in the final section of Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, which lyrically, if somewhat condescendingly, describes Dilsey's participation in the "call-and-response" sermon of Reverend Shegog. So while Morrison's early critical engagement with Faulkner's work may have been essentially blind to issues of racial representation and the cultural alienation of African-Americans, her subsequent creative and critical work has overtly confronted the problem of vision itself in American life and cultural expressive forms.

The eye may be prophylactic, but it cannot be beneficent--it is maleficent. In the Bible and even in the New Testament, there is no good eye, but there are evil eyes all over the place. (Lacan, Four 119)

Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me. (Song 6.5)

Not so long ago, a little girl said to me sweetly that it was about time somebody began to look after her so that she might seem lovable to herself. (Lacan, Four 257)

The publication of The Bluest Eye fifteen years after Morrison's graduation from Cornell is as complete a reversal of perspective from her Master's thesis as one could imagine. Not only does Morrison restore black women and girls to centre stage in The Bluest Eye, she also describes

the process of self-alienation that could have allowed and maybe even necessitated the oversights in her Master's Thesis. In Pecola Breedlove, Morrison creates a character who does not consciously, intellectually, choose alienation, as do Clarissa Dalloway and Quentin Compson, but whose alienation and isolation are imposed upon her by both her culture and her society, stunting her intellectual development and, ultimately, silencing her. More than a novel about the dysfunctions and disadvantages imposed by a racist and sexist society, though, The Bluest Eye expresses psychoanalytic ideas about perception and self-perception that have clear relevance to Morrison's career both as a critic and a creative writer, if one can any longer make the distinction. Barbara Christian argues that

> The theme [of The Bluest Eye] is at the base of the conflict of artistic and societal values between the Anglo-American and African-American cultures, complicated by the psychopolitical dominance of one culture over another. As such, this novel is a book about mythic, political, and cultural mutilation as much as it is a book about race and sex hatred. ("Contemporary Fables" 60)

That Morrison alludes to the "blues" both in the pun of her title and in the words of her text invites us to speculate on The Bluest Eye as another variation of the complaint that Morrison expressed more succinctly, if not more elegantly,

in an interview:

> The interest in vision, in seeing, is a fact of black life. As slaves and ex-slaves, black people were manageable and findable, as no other slave society would be, because they were black. So there is an enormous impact from the simple division of color--more than sex, age, or anything else. The complaint is not being seen for what one is. That is the reason why my hatred of white people is justified and their hatred for me is not. There is a fascinating book called Drylongso which collects the talk of black people. They say almost to a man that you never tell a white person the truth. He doesn't want to hear it. Their conviction is they are neither seen nor listened to. They also perceive themselves as morally superior because they do see. (Morrison to LeClair 376)

In The Bluest Eye, as her title cleverly suggests, Morrison explores and counterpoints the role of both the voice and the gaze in constituting, and destroying, African-American identity. She announces, through the intertextual play with the standard primer, her rejection of white visual standards of beauty and normality. In its very broadest sense, then, The Bluest Eye is a literary bildungsroman, in which Morrison explores her own relationship to literature of the

past, establishing her literary presence not only against Faulkner and Woolf, but also such African-American fore-figures as Ralph Ellison.[3]

(and your grandfather said, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me': and what did He mean by that? how, if He meant that little children should need to be suffered to approach Him, what sort of earth had He created; that if they had to suffer in order to approach Him, what sort of Heaven did He have?) (Absalom, Absalom! 198)

You have to understand that, Lord. You said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and harm them not." Did you forget? Did you forget about the children? Yes, you forgot. You let them go wanting, sit on road shoulders, crying next to their dead mothers. I've seen them charred, lame, halt. You forgot, Lord. You forgot how and when to be God. (The Bluest Eye 144)

In Pecola Breedlove we discover a text-book example of the desperate search for recognition and the horrible consequences of the failure to achieve it. In spite of the resonances of her last name, Pecola is unloved, apparently even by her mother, who, as cook and nanny in the home of a white family, lavishes more attention on her charges than on her own children. Morrison's narrator makes it clear that the self-loathing of Pauline and Cholly Breedlove disables them as parents and cripples their children when she describes the Breedlove's "ugliness" as intrinsic only to their own conviction:

> But their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. . . . You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely

> and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. (TBE [28])

Pecola cannot see herself clearly because, as a very dark-skinned girl in a world full of adoration for Hedy Lamar, Greta Garbo, Ginger Rogers, Shirley Temple, and coveted blonde, blue-eyed dolls, she cannot be recognized--that is valued--for who and what she is really is. Repeatedly rejected by her parents and members of her community, who see in her a mirror image of everything they do not want to be seen to be, Pecola yearns to achieve their image of beauty, represented metonymically by the blue eyes of "doll-like" white children. Pecola's desire, in its most reductive sense, is to be recognized and valued by those around her:

> Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time.
>
> Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see

> only what there was to see: the eyes of other people. (TBE 35)

From a Lacanian perspective, the gaze, most closely associated with the mirror stage and the Imaginary register, is one of the impossible objects of desire (petit objet a): not the gaze as seeing, but the gaze as seen:

> Imaginary identification is always identification on behalf of a certain gaze in the Other. We should always ask: for whom is the subject enacting this role? This gap between the way I see myself and the point from which I am being observed to appear likeable to myself is crucial for grasping hysteria. The hysterical neurotic is experiencing her- or himself as somebody who is enacting a role for the other. In short, the difference between how we see ourselves and the point from which we are being observed is the difference between imaginary and symbolic identification. (Sarup 103)

In the Lacanian mirror stage, the child identifies with something seen, but paradoxically that something is the child itself. Not coincidentally, then, Pecola feels that it is only the visible presence of her eyes which prevents her utter disappearance. Wanting to hide from a violent domestic dispute in her home, Pecola wills herself to disappear out of harm's way, but try as she might, she

cannot imagine the disappearance of her eyes:

> "Please, God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. . . . Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left.
>
> Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. (TBE 33)

Pecola's eyes do not see; they are seen. That is why she can tell Maureen Peal, who asks Pecola if she's ever seen a naked man, that "I wouldn't even look at him, even if I did see him. . . . Nobody's father would be naked in front of his own daughter" (TBE 55).

Pecola's Freudian slip, the translation of naked man into father, which is caught and cruelly exploited by Maureen, introduces us to the tragedy at the heart of the novel: the incestuous act that transforms Pecola's dissatisfaction with her appearance into complete madness. If it is the rejection of the community that leads to Pecola's desire for blue eyes, it is her father Cholly's misrecognition and therefore misplaced love of her which pushes her beyond hysteria to the private world of schizophrenia in which she can have blue eyes, but only at the cost of an alienating madness that separates her entirely from the community.

Pecola's father Cholly (Charles) Breedlove, too, is

constituted and destroyed by the gaze at a very early age. On the day of his beloved Aunt Jimmy's funeral, a group of white hunters surprises him during his first sexual encounter with a girl, Darlene. The hunters force Cholly to "perform" for their amusement. When they are gone, Cholly's hatred is directed at Darlene rather than the men, the shame of having her witness his degradation so overpowering as to eclipse his anger at the white man, which would have been pointless to express anyway:

> Never once did he consider directing his hatred toward the hunters. Such an emotion would have destroyed him. They were big, white, armed men. He was small, black helpless. His subconscious mind knew what his conscious mind did not guess--that hating them would have consumed him. . . . (TBE 118)

Shortly after this event, Cholly seeks out and is rejected by the father who abandoned him and his mother before his birth. Like Charles Bon[4] in Absalom, Absalom!, Cholly sees a mirror image of himself in his father:

> Cholly edged around to where [the men] stood], hardly believing he was at the end of his journey. There was his father, a man like any other man, but there indeed were his eyes, his mouth, his whole head. His shoulders lurked beneath that jacket, his voice, his hands--all real. (TBE 122)

Unlike Bon, however, who at least sees "recognition" in "the face in which he saw his own features" (AA 348, italics omitted), Cholly is utterly dismissed by his father's words: "'Tell that bitch she get her money. Now, get the fuck outta my face!'" (TBE 123). One of Cholly's reactions to this rejection is the shame of losing control of his bowels, an action which parallels and contrasts with his inability to complete the sexual act with Darlene.

His father's rejection disorients Cholly, and closes him off, at least temporarily, from the world of sound. The foreclosure of the symbolic name-of-the-father, represented by Cholly's deafness, is reinforced by his assumption of the foetal position at the end of the following passage:

> Cholly ran down the street, aware only of silence. People's mouths moved, their feet moved, a car jugged by--but with no sound. A door slammed in perfect soundlessness. His own feet made no sound. The air seemed to strangle him, hold him back. He was pushing through a world of invisible pine sap that threatened to smother him. Still he ran, seeing only silent moving things, until he came to the end of buildings, the beginning of open space, and saw the Ocmulgee River winding ahead. He scooted down a gravelly slope to a pier jutting out over the shallow water. Finding the deepest shadow under the pier, he crouched in it,

> behind one of the posts. He remained knotted there in fetal position, paralyzed, his fists covering his eyes, for a long time. No sound, no sight, only darkness and heat and the press of his knuckles on his eyelids. He even forgot his messed-up trousers. (TBE 124)

These two pivotal episodes--both involving the shame of being seen--result in Cholly's alienation not only from an anchoring past, but also from personal commitment to and responsibility for community and the future. As Roberta Rubenstein argues, Cholly is "infantilized" or "emasculated" in these encounters (140). But Cholly's alienation is described in terms of the music which he cannot express:

> The pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician. Only those who talk their talk through the gold of curved metal, or in the touch of black-and-white rectangles and taut skins and strings echoing from wooden corridors, could give true form to his life. Only they would know how to connect the heart of a red watermelon to the asafetida bag to the muscadine to the flashlight on his behind to the fists of money to the lemonade in a Mason jar to a man called Blue and come up with what all of that meant in joy, in pain, in anger, in love, and give it its final and pervading ache of freedom. Only

> a musician would sense, know, without even knowing that he knew, that Cholly was free. Dangerously free. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep. Free to sleep in doorways or between the white sheets of a singing woman. (TBE 125)

Unfortunately, Cholly is not a musician; he lacks the training, ability, or opportunity to express himself verbally at all, let alone in song.

Like Joe Christmas in Light in August, whose identity as a "Negro" is constituted and nurtured under nothing other than the insinuating, hate-filled gaze of Eupheus (Doc) Hines, Cholly matures through loss, rejection, and humiliation into a kind of amoral predator. Like Cholly Breedlove, Joe Christmas is also a man running away from his own lack-in-being. In much the same way as Morrison's narrator had previously described Cholly's humiliated response to his rejection by his father, Joe is described as escaping to a womb-like place after his initiation into sexuality:

> He was not running. But he was walking fast, and in a direction that was taking him further yet from home, from the house five miles away which he had left by climbing from a window and which he had not yet planned any way of reentering. He went on down the road fast and turned from it and sprang over a fence, into plowed earth. Something was growing in the furrows. Beyond were woods,

> trees. He reached the woods and entered, among the hard trunks, the branchshadowed quiet, hard-feeling, hardsmelling, invisible. In the not-seeing and the hardknowing as though in a cave he seemed to see a diminishing row of suavely shaped urns in moonlight, blanched. And not one was perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcolored, and foul. He touched a tree, leaning his propped arms against it, seeing the ranked and moonlit urns. He vomited. (LA 178)

The connotations of the womb-like state are, of course, different for Joe, associated with his having been discovered in a small dark closet after accidentally witnessing the performance of a sexual act. But, like Pecola and Cholly, Joe is similarly convinced by the gaze that he is hateful and by his exposure to the adult world that sexual expression is shameful and unnatural. Rather than turning their hatred entirely inward upon themselves like Pecola, however, Joe Christmas and Cholly Breedlove[5] cut themselves loose from a hostile society to become dangerously free men; paradoxically, but explicably, they pose the greatest danger to those women or girls with whom they are most intimate and with whom, therefore, they feel most vulnerable.

Given that there is no enabling foundation to either

Cholly's or Pecola's identity, it is little wonder that Cholly misrecognizes his daughter as she stands innocently and vacantly washing dishes in the kitchen. Cholly's rape of his daughter, as a contextual reading makes clear, is the act of a man who is free in a peculiar kind of way, free of any kind of constituting identity and therefore any moral responsibility for his actions. Susan Willis succinctly describes this kind of freedom:

> Abandoned at birth by his mother, rejected by his father for the sake of a poker game, and having experienced the ultimate moment of objectification when two white hunters catch him in his first sex act, Cholly Breedlove finds absolute freedom in the realization that he has nothing to lose. ("Eruptions" 328f9)

In the narrative of the rape scene, we receive a description of Cholly's vague helpless revulsion when confronted with the image of his daughter's back, and then his confusion when she repeats a gesture previously made by her mother:

> His hatred of her slimed in his stomach and threatened to become vomit. But just before the puke moved from anticipation to sensation, she shifted her weight and stood on one foot scratching the back of her calf with her toe. It was a quiet and pitiful gesture. Her hands were going around and around a frying pan, scraping

> flecks of black into cold, greasy dishwater. The timid, tucked-in look of the scratching toe--that was what Pauline was doing the first time he saw her in Kentucky. (TBE 128)

Mistaking his daughter for her mother, like Trueblood in The Invisible Man, Cholly ignores his daughter's struggles and forces himself on her, his sexual desire fed by the peculiar mixture of past horror and pleasures, represented at once by the shame of complete bodily surrender:

> The rigidness of her shocked body, the silence of her stunned throat, was better than Pauline's easy laughter had been. The confused mixture of his memories of Pauline and the doing of a wild and forbidden thing excited him, and a bolt of desire ran down his genitals, giving it length and softening the lips of his anus. Surrounding all of this lust was a border of politeness. (TBE 128)

Pecola represents to Cholly not only her mother, Pauline, but also Darlene, the girl who witnessed and shared his humiliation, and even his father, whose rejection of him sent Cholly reeling into the safe womb of the forest. While Morrison has been condemned by some for portraying Cholly's motivations for committing incest and rape, in other words for humanizing his inexcusable behaviour toward his daughter, she does so, I think, not to make us sympathize with Cholly, but to demonstrate the inevitable consequences

of Imaginary identifications and the foreclosure of the symbolic name-of-the-father. Like Trueblood in _Invisible Man_ and Charles Bon's son, Charles Etienne Bon, in _Absalom, Absalom!_, Cholly, cut off from his past, is equally unable to symbolize a relationship with his own progeny:

> the aspect of married life that dumbfounded him and rendered him totally disfunctional was the appearance of children. Having no idea of how to raise children; and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be. Had he been interested in the accumulation of things, he could have thought of them as his material heirs. . . . As it was, he reacted to them, and his reactions were based on what he felt at the moment. (TBE 126-27)

Ironically, perhaps only incest and its horrible consequences can unequivocally establish the filial relationship under these circumstances.[6] At the very least, Cholly's alienation and narcissistic freedom determine his destructive actions:

> Love is never any better than the lover. Wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly, but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved. The

> lover alone possesses his gift of love. The loved one is shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye. (The Bluest Eye 163)

Although Morrison appears to share Faulkner's obsession with incest in this novel, as well as in the later Song of Solomon, there are subtle differences in both the signification of incest and the use of the incest metaphor. In Faulkner, incest is either threatened or desired; it is rarely consummated, and is therefore idealized. But the metaphor of incest, as we have seen in Absalom, Absalom, sustains narrative desire and defers narrative disclosure while it describes a circular, solipsistic narrative economy whose endless recurrence can only be disrupted by the threat of miscegenation. In The Bluest Eye, incest is not idealized; it is portrayed as a violent and consequential action. Incest operates metaphorically in the novel as a barrier to growth and creativity: Pecola's baby dies; Pecola herself descends into madness; the marigolds fail to sprout in Claudia and Frieda's garden; they fail to sprout anywhere. Above all, Morrison extends the theoretical question of incest posed in Faulkner and Ellison to the real and horrible consequences for both perpetrator and victim of the act itself. Pecola's imprisonment in the mirror of her own mind after her father's perverted act of love bestows on her the blue eyes for which she had yearned attests rather to the horrors of narcissistic identification than to the

idyllic possibilities of a return to the womb suggested in the works of these two male writers. Moreover, Pecola's regression into silence and her virtual deafness alienate her from the efficacy of language and the healing power of her community.

While Pecola's tragedy may be far removed from the apparently relatively untroubled, middle class upbringing that Morrison herself claims to have experienced, the temptation to read The Bluest Eye autobiographically is nonetheless strong. Although Morrison has equivocated to Gloria Naylor that The Bluest Eye both "is not but . . . is" autobiographical (576), elsewhere she has pointed out specifically autobiographical elements in the novel, admitting that "most first novels are pretty autobiographical" (Jones and Vinson 129). I have previously noted that Barbara Christian sees in Morrison's portrayals of both Pecola and Claudia something like an allegory for the struggle faced by African-American artists in white hegemonic society, but, on a more personal level, Morrison suggests a biographical connection between herself and Claudia that may shed light on her use of sound and music to develop and contrast characters in the novel. Describing the way that "bits and pieces" of her family's personalities found their way into this work, Morrison lists

> my mother's habit of getting stuck like a record on some problem, going on for days and days and

> days and then just singing in between, you know, just like a saga. You wake up every morning and she has had another chapter of the same problem. (Interview by Jones and Vinson 129)

While the healing powers of voice are not specifically alluded to in this interview, the novel itself dramatizes just such a possibility to suggest that the difference between the Breedloves and Claudia MacTeer's family is less a socio-economic than a psycho-social one, one that can perhaps be summed up in the distinction between the gaze and the voice.

The difference is represented early in the novel in a scene which describes the ministrations of Claudia's mother and sister during Claudia's serious childhood illness:

> My mother's voice drones on. She is not talking to me. She is talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name: Claudia. . . . My mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying. I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. . . .
>
> My sister comes in. Her eyes are full of sorrow. She sings to me: "When the deep purple falls over sleepy garden walls, someone thinks of me. . . ." I doze, thinking of plums, walls, and **"someone."**
>
> But was it really like that? As painful as I

> remember? Only mildly. Or rather, it was a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it--taste it--sweet, musty . . . . So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die. (6-7)

While the voice of Claudia's mother is represented here, and elsewhere, as angry and impatient, Mrs. MacTeer's actions belie the harshness of her words; the voice, in other words, signifies contextually, as Claudia, the narrator, recognizes, even if Claudia, the child, does not realize that her mother was "not angry at me, but at my sickness." The "fructifying pain" that Claudia associates with this memory of her childhood illness is clearly associated with an acknowledgement of her mother's love and her mother's desire that she get well, but it is also associated with the possibility of her own death and with her mother's anger, in other words, with the very real possibility of loss: as a kind of primal scene, it contains traces for Claudia of the first stirrings of desire.

Unlike Pauline Breedlove, who sees in her daughter's face only a mirror for her own ugliness and inadequacy and who envelopes Pecola in her own image of worthlessness, Mrs. MacTeer, although she has little time to coddle her daughters, nurtures them with song:

> If my mother was in a singing mood, it wasn't so bad. She would sing about hard times, bad times, and somebody-done-gone-and-left-me times. But her voice was so sweet and her singing-eyes so melty I found myself longing for those hard times, yearning to be grown without "a thin di-i-ime to my name." I looked forward to the delicious time when "my man" would leave me, when I would "hate to see that evening sun go down . . ." 'cause then I would know "my man has left this town." Misery colored by the greens and blues in my mother's voice took all of the grief out of the words and left me with a conviction that pain was not only endurable, it was sweet. (TBE 17-18)

Like the "fructifying pain" of Claudia's illness and recovery, the blues sung by Claudia's mother speak both to loss, and to the desire that fortifies one through such loss. The "blues" in Claudia's mother's "singing-eyes" metaphorically epitomize the realization of Pecola's desire and translate the visual register into an aural one. Secure in, but not smothered by, the knowledge of their mother's love for them, and enticed by their mother's voice toward the possibilities that await them as women, Claudia and her sister Frieda escape the specular and damaging economy of the Breedlove household.

Now, perhaps, we can understand the significance of the

absence of music in Pecola's home: in spite of the presence of a piano in their house, "No happy drunk . . . had sat at the piano and played 'You Are My Sunshine'" (TBE 26). Equally significant is the fact that, in the narrative description of Cholly's first encounter with his future wife, Pauline is warned of his approach by his whistling--"One of these rapid, high-note riffs that black boys make up as they go while sweeping, shoveling, or just walking along. A kind of city-street music where laughter belies anxiety, and joy is as short and straight as the blade of a pocketknife" (TBE 89)--whereas Cholly approaches Pecola in a sinister, foreboding silence.

Given the contrast between the Breedlove and MacTeer homes, the bitter-sweet words of "St. Louis Blues," the tune sung by Mrs. MacTeer that so captivates Claudia and her sister, resonate with the same kind of irony as they do in Faulkner's short story titled "That Evening Sun." In the short story, the Compson's maid, Nancy, almost paralyzed by fear of returning to her home because she suspects her violent husband may be waiting for her there, begs Mr. Compson and his children to accompany her home. Her hope is, of course, that when "that evening sun go down," her man will have left town. The brutal domestic violence in the Breedlove home and Claudia's naive response to her mother's song suggest the way that the lyrics function ironically in The Bluest Eye as well,[7] although the effective action that

the otherwise scarce Mr. MacTeer takes to protect his other daughter, Frieda, from the sexual advances of their boarder, points at least to the possibility of home as a sanctuary for children, rather than as a place where they can be abused without interference from the community.[9]

In this novel, as in Morrison's other work, music generally connotes, if not social harmony, at least a way of bestowing communal value on life's problems and therefore of offering a commitment to deal with them. As Keith Byerman points out, even the local prostitutes use the blues not only to cope with their own lives, but to communicate with others in the community:

> Poland is "forever ironing, forever singing." Her songs are blues, which serve less to express personal problems than to entertain through reminders of the nature of the world in which they live. These folk arts enable them to transcend the private obsessions of other characters. The world may well be a place of misery and doom, but folk wisdom dictates that one adapts to circumstances rather than resignedly move toward evasion or self-destruction. Blues and folk tales imply that trouble is <u>both</u> personal and communal and that life is a matter of adaptation and survival rather than resignation and death. The whores treat themselves and Pecola with consideration because

they neither despair nor hope. (104)

In one sense, then, The Bluest Eye is a sustained blues performance, one that demands that we break the silence surrounding racism, neglect, and incest by giving voice to the desires of the victims who both perpetuate and suffer from it.

It would be a mistake, however, to call the blues a simple folk art. James H. Cone argues convincingly that African-American musical expression is anything but simple. He suggests that the blues, as a secular version of "slave songs" such as African-American spiritual and gospel tunes, are underwritten by a "complex world of thought" which cannot simply be labelled "'compensatory,' 'childlike,' or even 'beautiful'" (19). Cone argues that the blues arise out of the existential paradox and absurdity of African-American existence after slavery, in which the contradiction of one's treatment by white society and one's view of one-self necessitates the "affirmation of self": "the blues affirm the somebodiness of black people" (117). But while Cone would argue that the blues are not a vehicle for African-American protest against the white community--"protest assumes community [with the oppressor]" (85)--other theorists see a more integrated aesthetic origin and development of the blues in American society, one that has admittedly, nonetheless, been historically racialized and/or stigmatized. Certainly, Morrison puns on the word "blue" in

The Bluest Eye to signify intertextually between cultures and races and to register a protest against the harmful internalization of white standards of beauty and social adequacy in the African-American subject.

It is in the context of such a notion of both integration and isolation that I wish to view Morrison's use of music, particularly those forms most closely associated with African-American culture--gospel, the blues, and jazz. If there is anything that might be called a "progression" in Morrison's work, it is the elaboration of the idea that such music provides a complex way of viewing and talking about both textuality and intertextuality. Barbara Rigney explains how we might relate text to music in Morrison's work:

> Images of music pervade her work, but so also does a musical quality of language, a sound and rhythm that permeate and radiate in every novel.
>
> Pilate, for example, "sings" throughout Song of Solomon, in which both the motif of music and the musicality of language are so crucial. The solution to Milkman's quest is found in the words and rhythms of a song. . . . (Rigney 8)

By increasingly focusing on music in her novels, Morrison unsettles the Imaginary economy of the gaze with an emphasis on voice, and a revaluation of the aural senses over the visual ones. That voice takes on an instrumentality that orchestrates the internal texture of her own novels and

regulates the intertextual economy between them and those of Faulkner. She explores both the implications and limitations of Faulkner's own experiments with voice by inserting the voice of her narrator, or that of her characters, into those moments in Faulkner's texts when the gaze threatens to short-circuit the verbal exchange between white- and African-Americans. Not surprisingly, Song of Solomon, with its immediate evocation both of lyrical voice and of the Biblical source of Faulkner's title Absalom, Absalom!, is a novel which invites us to discover such textual/intertextual structures.

O Solomon don't leave me here
Cotton balls to choke me
O Solomon don't leave me here
Buckra's arms to yoke me (Song of Solomon 307)

Who's been botherin my sweet sugar lumpkin?
Who's been botherin my baby?
Who's been botherin my sweet sugar lumpkin?
Who's been botherin my baby girl? (Song of Solomon 322)

Arguably, those sections of the Old Testament which are associated with the stories of David and Solomon, to which the titles of both Morrison's and Faulkner's novels refer, contain or are associated with some of the most lyrical passages in the Bible: we find in the relatively short space between First Chronicles and Isaiah both the devout psalms of David and the rhapsodic songs of his youngest son Solomon. Moreover, Faulkner implicitly suggests the refrain of a song in his repetition of the name Absalom, which is a

syntax not to be found in the King James version of the Bible (Samuel 18 and 19), and Morrison alludes openly in her title to the specifically lyrical passages in Song. But it is only in Morrison's text that song features prominently as a hermeneutic device. And whereas both novels employ polyphony to the effect of suggesting the multiplicity and ambiguity of constructing meaning from the past, in direct contrast to the emphasis on seeing and telling in Absalom, Absalom!, Morrison's novel invites us to extend the implications of her use of the gaze and the voice in The Bluest Eye by asking us to consider the importance of hearing and listening in Song of Solomon. By doing so, we can perhaps illustrate Kristeva's definition of intertextuality as the "transposition of one sign system into another, such that the new signifying system may be produced with different 'signifying material' and thus does not have to occur entirely within language" (Rajan 63). Michael Awkward describes how one might accomplish this transposition:

> by reading black women's writing in the context of African and European philosophical and religious systems, we may mark when and how this writing privileges 'other' ways of knowing. In a complementary move, we may begin to ask the same questions about race, gender, and class of 'canonical' texts (and 'noncanonical' texts by white men, black men, white women, men and women of color,

> everybody) that we ask of those by black women. We should continue to locate black women's writing in its multiple contexts. (Awkward Inspiriting 8-9)

The multiple contexts of Song of Solomon include not only the King James Bible, but also, to name just a few more, classical mythology, fairy tales (there are explicit allusions to Goldilocks, Hansel and Gretel, and Jack and the Beanstalk), and African-American folklore and music. If we are to insert Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Go Down, Moses into that list, we must acknowledge the multiple contexts of Faulkner's work as well: in fact, the lists would appear very similar. As I explore the intertextual spaces between Morrison and Faulkner in the remainder of this chapter, I will do so not to demonstrate direct one-to-one correspondences between their works, but to suggest a way of reading between them that can produce both new significations and "other ways of knowing."

As the Biblical intertext that mediates between the two novels suggests, both Absalom, Absalom! and Song of Solomon describe a genealogical search for origins: "So all Israel were reckoned by genealogies; and behold, they were written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah, who were carried away to Babylon" (1 Chronicles 9.1). Critics have noted this similarity and one in particular, Susan Willis, has further suggested that Morrison alludes to Faulkner's novel by creating inversions of his "dystopic" genealogical

visions: for example, Pilate is a Thomas Sutpen with "utopian aspirations," rather than a "'design'" ("Eruptions" 319), and the cohesive, fecund three-woman households of Pilate, Reba, and Hagar in Song of Solomon and Eva, Sula, and Hannah in Sula ironically invert the sterile, polarized household comprising Judith, Rosa, and Clytie in Absalom, Absalom! (323-4). Willis concludes that "Faulkner's retrenched espousal of the male-dominated social model and his tenacious refusal to imagine anything else condition his bleak vision of society" (324). But as Willis herself notes and explains, the utopian vision expressed in Morrison's novels is nowhere as clearly joyful and uncomplicated as this contrast would imply. Moreover, if we are to consider the household comprising Clytie, Rosa, and Judith dystopic, it is not because Faulkner allows us to glimpse "a potentially radical new form of social organization, based on subsistence rather than accumulation and women rather than men," only to snatch this vision away by leaving the male, Sutpen, at "the center of the household" (324). The household is less home than prison because the women in it do not communicate with one another. In fact Willis, when she argues that "[R]ace, too, is not confronted or transcended" (324), ignores the role that racial difference, particularly Rosa's virulent racism, plays in creating a dystopia in the Sutpen household.

It would be easy to suggest and even to demonstrate

that the two novels are linked intertextually only as ironic inversions of one another. Indeed, I will suggest even more places in the text where such ironic inversion occurs. But this is just one of the ways that the two novels can be seen to engage one another. By exploring the relevance of the jazz metaphor--which, as we have seen, is translated through the intervention of a Lacanian model into the notion of "full speech" ("saying the Other")--and by casting our net wider to catch refrains from other texts, we can perhaps set into motion a dialogue which allows us to overhear the riffing, sometimes bitchy and complaining, other times loving and obeisant, between the texts. As Guitar asks Milkman, "Can't I love what I criticize?" (225).

In the field of the unconscious the ears are the only orifice that cannot be closed. Whereas making oneself seen is indicated by an arrow that really comes back towards the subject, making oneself heard goes toward the other. (Lacan, Four 195)

If Absalom, Absalom! is a text in which the quest, at its most basic level, is to "see" what's out there (at Sutpen's Hundred), in which this quest takes shape through the identificatory merging of identities, and in which the resolution of it is "seeing Clytie" and therefore discovering some truth about the life of Thomas Sutpen, Song of Solomon is a text in which the quest for truth is utterly dependent on "hearing." From the opening pages of the novel, in which Pilate's childish rendition of the chant, "O Sugarman done

fly away / Sugarman done gone / Sugarman cut across the sky / Sugarman gone home" (5), accompanies the spectacular suicide of Robert Smith, to its final pages, when Milkman sings an earlier version of the song to a dying Pilate before taking his own plunge into the air, Song of Solomon asks us to suspend, or at least to question, all other senses and instead to listen, and to get the words right. Sight will always deceive us in this novel, as it deceives Milkman about the bag of gold in Pilate's house, as it deceives Hagar when she looks into the mirror and judges herself worthless, as it deceives Guitar in Danforth when he thinks he sees Milkman loading his gold onto the train. If we need any more proof of the potential malevolence of the gaze in Song of Solomon, we have only to consider Guitar's father, his body split in half by an industrial accident, placed "cut side down skin side up, in the coffin. Facing each other. Each eye looking deeply into its mate" (SS 226). Morrison does not oppose her utopian world to Faulkner's dystopian one, so much as she asks us to reconsider the very senses that we use to comprehend and label the world around us. Rather than contradicting Faulkner's vision, Morrison suggests how vision itself may be enhanced and complemented through an emphasis not only on orality but aurality as well, a distinction that Morrison herself makes in regard to her work: "my efforts to make aural literature--A-U-R-A-L--work because I do hear it"

(Interview by Davis 418).

As she does in The Bluest Eye, Morrison contrasts two households in Song of Solomon, and once again she uses music to do so. Early in the novel, Macon Dead walks by the house of his estranged sister, Pilate, on his way home from work. He hears the singing coming from within the house, and since "There was no music there [in his own home] and tonight he wanted just a bit of music," he stops to listen:

> They were singing some melody that Pilate was leading. A phrase that the other two were taking up and building on. Her powerful contralto. Reba's piercing soprano in counterpoint, and the soft voice of the girl, Hagar, who must be about ten or eleven now, pulled him like a carpet tack under the influence of a magnet. (SS 29)

Unlike the sterile and meaningless communication Macon has established and nurtured within his own family, this vocal harmony has a healing effect and, moreover, provides a link for Macon with a past consisting of "fields and wild turkey and calico" (SS 29). In these passages and many others in which she alludes to the conversation of music, Morrison establishes a metaphor for the hermeneutic quest in the novel: Milkman Dead, Macon's son, will have to learn to listen to Pilate's music and the music from the past in order to discover his own, and his father's, identity. While his quest will take him far geographically, it will

lead him to the birth-place of a part-Indian woman named "Sing," his grandmother, and there Milkman will learn, by listening and remembering, that what he needed to know was always already there in the garbled words of his aunt's nursery rhyme. And perhaps Morrison is evoking her previous use of music in The Bluest Eye when Milkman's potential assassin and erstwhile best friend, Guitar, tells someone that he earned his name not because he plays the guitar, but because he desperately wanted to as a child: is Morrison suggesting that Guitar, like Cholly, might have been a less dangerous man if he had found expression in music?

While it would be impossible and even reductive to suggest one-to-one correspondences between characters in the two novels--for example, Pilate's fascination for geography and Macon Dead's obsession with establishing a name and gaining wealth and power at the cost of his family's happiness make them both candidates for comparison to Thomas Sutpen--it is nonetheless useful to contrast the quests and discoveries of Quentin Compson in Absalom, Absalom! and Milkman Dead in Song of Solomon as a means of testing my hypothesis regarding the interplay between the gaze and the voice in Faulkner and Morrison. Both Quentin and Milkman, whether they are aware of it or not, are in search of home or an explanatory origin. Each sets out in search of one thing--for Milkman it is literally buried treasured, for Quentin it is the truth about Thomas Sutpen--and discovers

instead something about himself. Quentin's obsession with the history of his community is overtly expressed in Faulkner's novel; Milkman's obsession is at first personal and less explicitly alluded to in the text as a "concentration on things behind him" to the extent that it was "Almost as though there no future to be had" (SS 35). Quentin's suicide is recorded in the Genealogy of Absalom as fact (and was portrayed in the earlier The Sound and the Fury--in a sense, both Quentin and Milkman are, from the outset of the respective novels, already dead), whereas we never find out if Milkman's plunge is suicidal, homicidal, or an attempt at duplicating the flight of his ancestor.

Compared on this basis, Milkman Dead and Quentin Compson may be considered modern mythic heroes, each of them a type, I think, of a modern Ulysses. Where this intertext leads us is to the Trojan saga, and the resonance of two names: Clytemnestra[9] and Circe. As we have already seen in my discussion of Absalom, Absalom! in the previous chapter, Clytie serves as a hermeneutic knot in the Faulkner novel, her face and skin color a symbol, both for the narrators in the novel and some of its critics, of the "debacle" of the Sutpen family, her significance to Quentin and these same critics apparently entirely visual: "And you wouldn't have known either unless you'd been out there and seen Clytie." We have seen that Quentin's verbal engagement with Clytie is brief and hesitant, even fearful: I have suggested, in

fact, that what Quentin may fear most is Clytie's knowledge. In Absalom, Clytie's defense and torching of the Sutpen mansion are implicitly viewed as an extension of her loyal service to the Sutpen family: she is, after all, Thomas Sutpen's daughter. Not even the critics have dared to suggest other motives for her actions.

The encounter between Quentin and Clytie to which I have alluded above occurs during a scene that we might classify, using the Ulysses intertext, as an inverted parody of the hero's descent into hell. Indeed, critics before me have remarked upon this correspondence, noting that the ascent into the Sutpen mansion occurs in darkness, there Quentin meets a figure from the dead, and he returns irrevocably changed by his experience. All that would appear to be missing--and this is, of course, supplied in the parallel episode in Song of Solomon[10]--is a Cerberus to guard the gates. The similarities between these two episodes--Quentin's meeting with Clytie and Milkman's meeting with Circe--are striking, to say the least, and their significance deserves to be explored here. But I want to suggest that Circe is not just an ironic inversion of Clytemnestra Sutpen: the "humming" Weimaramers in Song of Solomon point to the possibility that she is instead an avatar of Clytie's earlier incarnation, Raby, in one of Faulkner's earliest extant versions of Absalom, Absalom, the short story "Evangeline."

When Milkman Dead, on his quest for gold, approaches the ironically named Butler house he has been told was once occupied by their servant Circe, a woman who had helped his father and his aunt escape the white men who had killed their father, he does so with a sense of dread. What he least expects to find there, however, is Circe herself, who the elderly Reverend Cooper tells him "Was a hundred when I was a boy" (SS 235). His discovery of her in the house is narrated in terms of a fairy tale, or a dream:

> He had had dreams as a child . . . of the witch who chased him down dark alleys, between lawn trees, and finally into rooms from which he could not escape. Witches in black dresses and red underskirts; witches with pink eyes and green lips, tiny witches, long rangy witches. . . . So when he saw the woman at the top of the stairs there was no way for him to resist climbing up toward her outstretched hands, her fingers spread wide for him, her mouth gaping open for him, her eyes devouring him. In a dream you climb the stairs. (SS 241)

The scene partakes of the logic of a dream, and Milkman surrenders himself to that logic as if under a spell. But what breaks the spell and forces him to "surface" from the dream "was a humming sound around his knees" (SS 242) coming from the Weimaraners. "Daytime" logic is then further

tested when Milkman confronts the discrepancy between Circe's appearance and her voice:

> She was old. So old she was colorless. So old only her mouth and eyes were distinguishable features in her face. Nose, chin, cheekbones, forehead, neck all had surrendered their identity to the pleats and crochet-work of skin committed to constant change. (SS 242)

But "out of the toothless mouth came the strong, mellifluent voice of a twenty-year-old-girl" (SS 243).

Milkman's encounter with Circe is a trial of both his senses and his intellect: he must overcome the nausea that the smell of rotting flesh and dog feces induces in him; he must acknowledge the "reality" of the living presence of a woman who should, by rights, be dead; and he must somehow reconcile the fact that Circe's "dainty habits . . . matched her torn and filthy clothes in precisely the way her strong young cultivated voice matched her wizened face" (SS 244). In short, he must unravel the threads of "common sense" that have previously comprised for him the very tapestry of Western bipolar logic. Central to this process, as Circe repeatedly tells him, is the ability to <u>listen</u>, not just to Circe's words, but to what she is <u>saying</u>.

Before returning to <u>Song of Solomon</u>, I will elaborate this point through reference to <u>Absalom, Absalom!</u> and "Evangeline." In <u>Absalom</u>, of course, Quentin does not

listen to Clytie, although he does obey her command to follow Rosa up the stairs of the Sutpen mansion (something he probably would have done anyway, out of sheer curiosity). If he had listened to Clytie, or shown an interest in listening to her, Quentin might have learned something. Instead, as we have seen, Quentin is driven by an infantile scopic impulse, the overwhelming desire to "see" and be seen by what is hiding upstairs. Moreover, Clytie is depicted in Absalom as somewhat taciturn. At any rate, we never discover what it is that Clytie knows, or what motivates her to guard the Sutpen mansion so fervently that she will commit suicide and murder to prevent outside interference.

In the earlier version of Absalom, the short story "Evangeline" which features, instead of Quentin and Rosa, an unnamed narrator and his friend, Don, the "Clytie" character is much less taciturn. Like Circe (and Clytie), Raby is "incredibly old: a small woman with a myriad wrinkled face in color like pale coffee and as still and cold as granite" (594-5). Significantly, the narrator deduces that she has "Indian blood" (595). What is particularly striking, however, in reference to Morrison's novel, is that Raby too employs dogs to guard the white man's mansion. Like Circe's dogs, Raby's dogs are German (shepherds), descended from a line imported by the white master. It is useless to speculate as to whether or not Morrison was familiar with the short story: it was collected for the first time in 1972,

five years before Song of Solomon's publication, but long after Morrison's overt critical involvement with Faulkner ended. Nonetheless, it is striking that both writers, perhaps attuned to the Ulysses intertext, depicted dogs guarding the white man's mansion.

While the use of dogs in both narratives is perhaps inherently interesting as a curious synchronicity, it serves my purpose rather to point to "Evangeline" itself and to the possibility of a dialogic relationship between a white male character and a black female which can serve as a commentary on both Quentin's encounter with Clytie in Absalom and Milkman's encounter with Circe. Once the narrator, who presents himself as a reporter, has "passed" the dog guarding the Sutpen mansion, Raby complies with his demands for information. She appears to tell him everything she knows about Charles Bon and Judith and Henry Sutpen: essentially that Henry murdered Bon because Bon was already married and therefore had committed bigamy when he married Judith. Raby also surprises the narrator by telling him that Henry Sutpen is her brother. But she tips her hand when she tells him, "You'll hear what I going to tell you. What I aint going to tell you aint going to hear" (602). What the narrator discovers after speaking to Raby, and it is not clear whether he learns this by actually interviewing Henry or by imagining that he does, is that Bon, too, was Henry Sutpen's brother, a fact which would have made the marriage to Judith

not only bigamous, but incestuous. The final "surprise" in the story which ends after Raby's torching of the Sutpen mansion, is the narrator's discovery of a picture which suggests that Bon's first wife had negroid features. Like the novel which Faulkner developed from it, the story ends with both a spectacular display and a specular reaction, as the narrator is left to ponder the mystery of racial indeterminacy.

The relevance to my intertextual study of both the narrative details and the way they are disclosed in "Evangeline" is made clear by Raby's response to the narrator's question, a question that Quentin, apparently, could never bring himself to ask of Clytie: "Why did you do all this [hide him for forty years] for Henry Sutpen? Didn't you have your own life to live, your own family to raise?" (604) It is this question that elicits the information regarding Raby's biological status: "She spoke, her voice not waisthigh, level, quiet. 'Henry Sutpen is my brother'" (604). Confessing to the ties of blood with the white man whom she hides, Raby clarifies the issue of her sacrifice with a simple statement of fact. While Clytie never makes such a confession in Absalom, Absalom!, either some vestigial residue of Raby's character in her or some intricate web of western, Eurocentric logic within the minds of the novel's critics, seems to compel us to draw the same conclusion about her: it is the powerful filial bond, not

merely servile loyalty, which motivates her.

Raby tells the narrator of "Evangeline," "'You'll hear what I going to tell you. What I aint going to tell you aint going to hear.'" Circe will tell Milkman, "'You don't listen to people. Your ear is on your head, but it's not connected to your brain" (SS 249). Milkman, like the narrator of "Evangeline," opens himself up to hear the story of an old woman living alone, caring for her master's property--in this case, the dogs--and, seeing how she remains at the mansion tending to their needs even above her own, asks: "You loved those white folks that much?" Circe responds with a story:

> Do you know why [the mistress] killed herself? She couldn't stand to see the place go to ruin. She couldn't live without servants and money and what it could buy. Every cent was gone and the taxes took whatever came in. She had to let the upstairs maid go, then the cook, then the dog trainer, then the yardman, then the chauffeur, then the car, then the woman who washed once a week. Then she started selling bits and pieces--land, jewels, furniture. The last few years we ate out of the garden. Finally she couldn't take it anymore. The thought of having no help, no money--well, she couldn't take that. She had to let everything go."

"But she didn't let you go." Milkman had no trouble letting his words snarl.

"No, she didn't let me go. She killed herself."

"And you still loyal." (SS 249)

Circe's indignant outburst, a blues song accompanied by the music of the dogs' steady humming, is a lesson for Milkman in listening. Still governed not only by a bipolar scopic logic--Circe is there, therefore she must be emotionally attached to the mansion--but also by Eurocentric notions of economy, implanted by his father, in which proprietorship is always only associated with the desire for gainful acquisition, Milkman fails at first to hear in Circe's words the hatred of her former masters that compels her to oversee the total destruction of the Butler's mansion. Circe is not "just singing the blues": her lyrics feed and sustain her very existence. Circe's life, in fact, appears by some obscure agency to be prolonged just so that she may survive long enough for her to accomplish this feat. Unlike Clytie or Raby, Circe will never torch the Butler mansion: such an act, we might speculate, would be too humane, would amount almost to an act of forgiveness or mercy.

The lesson that Circe teaches Milkman is not a lesson in hate, however; it is, as I have said before, a lesson in how to listen. Milkman must <u>ignore</u> what he sees (and ignore all his other senses as well: Circe thanks him for pre-

tending her house "didn't stink" (SS 250)), not just Circe's appearance but the appearance of servitude that her continued presence in the Butler's house implies. Only by suspending everything he has been taught by his parents and his community, and by fully entering the logic of the dream, can he learn that lesson. In other words, Circe asks Milkman to forget "knowledge" and listen to "truth," the truth of the unconscious that the dream state sometimes allows one to overhear. Milkman's meeting with Circe is ideal preparation for listening to the rhyme of the children in Shalimar (the spelling of which is, significantly, discordant with its pronunciation, Shalamone):

> Milkman took out his wallet and pulled from it his airplane ticket stub, but he had no pencil to write with, and his pen was in his suit. He would just have to listen and memorize it. He closed his eyes and concentrated while the children, inexhaustible in their willingness to repeat a rhythmic, rhyming action game, performed the round over and over again. And Milkman memorized all of what they sang. (SS 306, emphasis added)

Like Milkman's experience in the Butler mansion, Quentin's experience at Sutpen's Hundred in Absalom, Absalom! is also invested with a dream-like quality. When Quentin returns from Sutpen's Hundred, he recalls approaching Henry Sutpen's room, uncertain whether now or

then he was asleep or awake:

> then he was lying on the bed, naked, swabbing his body steadily with the discarded shirt, sweating still, panting: so that when, his eye-muscles aching and straining into the darkness and the almost dried shirt still clutched in his hand, he said 'I have been asleep' it was all the same, there was no difference: waking or sleeping he walked down that upper hall between the scaling walls and beneath the cracked ceiling, toward the faint light which fell outward from the last door . . . . (AA 372, emphasis added)

Still and always trapped by the gaze, however, Quentin confronts a Henry who is only a mirror image of himself:

> waking or sleeping it was the same: the bed, the yellow sheets and pillow, the wasted yellow face with closed, almost transparent eyelids on the pillow, the wasted hands crossed on the breast as if he were already a corpse; waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived. (AA 373, emphasis added)

Even Quentin's conversation with Henry can only endlessly mirror itself in what Peter Brooks notes is a "palindromic" exchange. There are to be no lessons for Quentin, from either Henry or Clytie, as his final words to Shreve indicate: "I dont hate [the South]. I dont! I dont hate

it! I dont hate it!" (AA 378).

In Absalom, Absalom!, Quentin "sees" Clytie, but we cannot be so sure that he "hears" her. Certainly, he does not interrogate her the way the first-person narrator of "Evangeline" interrogates Raby. Of course, most of the information provided by Raby is already known to Quentin before he meets Clytie. He does not have to ask her why she has remained at the mansion, why she continues to remain with Henry: by the same logic that not only appears to underwrite but actually produces the knowledge that Charles Bon would willingly die for the acceptance and love of his white father, the reader is asked to assume that Clytie would die protecting, not her sister Judith, who narrators in the novel lead us to believe shared Clytie's hardships, but her murdering white brother.[11] Her silence, as opposed to Raby's willing disclosure, perhaps dignifies Clytie, but this same silence does not necessarily dignify critics of the novel. Perhaps we need to listen a little more closely to Raby's words: "You'll hear what I going to tell you. What I aint going to tell you aint going to hear."

By suggesting that Morrison perhaps "hears" Clytie in a different register than most other critics of the novel, and that Clytie's voice can somehow be heard coming out of the mouth of Circe in Song of Solomon, I may appear to be overlooking one fundamental and perhaps troubling difference: Circe is not her master's daughter. To that objection I can

only reply that we do not know whose daughter Circe is. We can hear only what Circe "going to tell" and what she tells us, I think, is that it doesn't matter whose daughter she was: nothing will change the fact that she was once a slave and that her mistress killed herself rather than face such a life. To say that Faulkner idealizes and perhaps even romanticizes the relationships produced by miscegenation in Absalom, Absalom! in much the same way as he idealizes incest, is merely to argue that this novel demonstrates the inevitable failure of vision in a society which is utterly obsessed with color but can neither curb its own lusts nor control the product of desire. Shreve tells us as much when he informs Quentin:

> I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won't quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won't show up sharp against the snow. (AA 378)

Clytie is both implicated in and escapes the logic of such a vision: what she aint going to tell we aint going to hear.

Near the end of Song of Solomon, Milkman once again closes his eyes, but this time to recite the names of black men and women as a way of reclaiming his connection to the past:

> He closed his eyes and thought of the black men in

> Shalimar, Roanoke, Petersburg, Newport News, Danville, in the Blood Bank, on Darling Street, in the pool halls, the barbershops. Their names. Names they got from yearnings, gestures, flaws, events, mistakes, weaknesses. Names that bore witness. Macon Dead, Sing Byrd, Crowell Byrd, Pilate, Reba, Hagar, Magdalene, First Corinthians, Milkman, Guitar, Railroad Tommy, Hospital Tommy, Empire State (he just stood around and swayed), Small Boy, Sweet, Circe, Moon, Nero, Humpty-Dumpty, Blue Boy, Scandinavia, Quack-Quack, Jericho, Spoonbread, Ice Man, Dough Belly, Rocky River, Gray Eye, Cock-a-Doodle-Doo, Cool Breeze, Muddy Waters, Pinetop, Jelly Roll, Fats, Lead-belly, Bo Diddley, Cat-Iron, Peg-Leg, Son, Shortstuff, Smoky Babe, Funny Papa, Bukka, Pink, Bull Moose, B.B., T-Bone, Black Ace, Lemon, Washboard, Gatemouth, Cleanhead, Tampa Red, Juke Boy, Shine, Staggerlee, Jim the Devil, Fuck-up and Dat Nigger. (SS 334)

As the name "Guitar" comes "angling out from these thoughts," we are reminded that Morrison's act of naming once again establishes a relationship between her work and the world of music and sound. As John Leonard notes, "If not for a Pilate and a Guitar, Macon (Milkman) Dead would not have learned to fly" (39).

In the next chapter I will continue to investigate what this means for the intertextual relationship between Morrison and Faulkner by examining Beloved, which Morrison dedicates to the unnamed and uncalled millions who died during the middle passage, and Go Down, Moses, whose title echoes the words of one of the most powerful and politically significant African-American gospel songs. But while both texts situate gospel music as a healing force in the context of an African-American community which is obviously beleaguered and degraded by racism, Morrison more fully exploits the political and social implications of lyrical voice in her novel, implications which are already hinted at in Song of Solomon when Reba and Pilate protest the death of their daughter and granddaughter Hagar in their double-voiced prayer, which ends in the trumpeting anger of Pilate's affirmation, "And she was loved!" (SS 323).

In Beloved, Morrison draws out Pilate's note of love and anger to reclaim the connection between generations of African-American mothers and daughters whose identities, if not whose very lives, were sacrificed to the demands of slavery and racism. Morrison's novel challenges many of Faulkner's portrayals of black women in Go Down, Moses, but also reveals in Faulkner's work a profound ambivalence about black womanhood that manifests itself alternately in a carefully orchestrated foreclosure of the black woman's sexuality and an almost hysterical "surfacing" or eruption

of anxiety in white male characters who are confronted with a desiring black subject. Together, these novels speak between themselves about the complex construction of black womanhood and motherhood in America to describe a process by which the African-American woman can escape objectification and reclaim both her speech and her desire.

NOTES

[1] Morrison, Jazz 228.

[2] See John N. Duvall ("Authentic Ghost Stories" and "Doe Hunting") and Cowart. Most recently, Mary Jane Dickerson concludes a short study of women in Go Down, Moses by comparing Faulkner's portrayals with those of Morrison in Beloved.

[3] For an examination of the intertextual relationship between The Bluest Eye and Ellison's Invisible Man, see Awkward, Inspiriting Influences.

[4] Both Morrison and Faulkner have a tendency to load names with symbolic value: the names Charles Bon, Cholly Breedlove, and Joe Christmas are similar and similarly ironic in resonance.

[5] Morrison continues this pattern, but with a difference, in her portrayal of Joe Trace in Jazz. An orphan as well, Joe too proves to be a dangerous man to the woman he loves when he hunts down and murders Dorcas. However, Morrison's narrator imagines a way out of the vicious circle of narcissistic love for Joe and Violet.

[6] See Spillers' article, "'The Permanent Obliquity . . .'" for a discussion of incest.

[7] The lyrics can also be seen to function ironically when we consider a common lyric variant in the song which replaces "man" with "daddy." Another significant variant, of course, is "baby" for "man." Bessie Smith, one of the most famous women blues recorders, sings the latter variant (Taft).

[9] Morrison reported to Rosemarie K. Lester that a similar incident happened to her and her sister when they were children: "I do remember a white man following my sister and me into our house, up the stairs. We lived in an apartment on the second floor. My father was there, and he picked him up and threw him down the stairs, and then picked up our tricycle and threw the tricycle down after him" (50).

[9] The shortened version of this name, Clytie, is used much more frequently in the text and we really have only Mr. Compson's word for it that Sutpen named her Clytemnestra. The name could also refer, with ironic resonance as well, to the nymph Clytïe who, according to The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology, "was spurned by her former lover Helius" and "tattle[d] on him to the father of his new mistress. The resulting disaster caused Helius to hate Clytie, and she wasted away until she was transformed into a heliotrope--a flower whose head turns to follow the sun's course through the sky each day" (168).

[10] In 1976, when Morrison had just finished writing Song of Solomon, she discussed with Robert Stepto the relevance of the Ulysses theme to black men's lives: "The big scene is the traveling Ulysses scene, for black men. They are moving" (391).

[11] In my Master's Thesis, "Identity Confusion in Absalom, Absalom!: Looking at the Wrong Blackbird? (unpublished 1986), I make the rather unorthodox claim that there is evidence in the text that points to the possibility that Clytie Sutpen dies to protect her black half-brother Charles Bon.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROARING OF 124 BLUES-TONE:

TONI MORRISON REMEMORIES GO DOWN, MOSES

In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound. . . . (Beloved 259)

And the sound of the novel, sometimes cacophonous, sometimes harmonious, must be an inner ear sound or a sound just beyond hearing, infusing the text with a musical emphasis that words can do sometimes even better than music can. (Morrison, "Unspeakable Things" 31-2)

Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. There may be a long chord, but no final chord. And it agitates you. Spirituals agitate you, no matter what they are saying about how it is all going to be. There is something underneath them that is incomplete. (Morrison in McKay, "An Interview" 411)

. . . I read those slave narratives--there are sometimes three or four sentences of half a page, each one of which could be developed in an art form, marvelous. Just to figure out how to--you mean to tell me she beat the dogs and the man and pulled a stump out of the ground? Who is she, you know? Who is she? It's just incredible. And all of that will surface, it will surface, and my huge joy is thinking that I am in some way part of that. . . . (Morrison in Stepto, "Intimate Things" 394)

With Faulkner, there was always something to surface. (Morrison, "Faulkner and Women" 297)

In 1942, Faulkner dedicated his soon to be published novel Go Down, Moses to Caroline Barr:

> To Mammy / Caroline Barr / Mississippi / [1840-1940] / Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love.

On the one hand, Faulkner's tribute to the former slave who nurtured and guided him and his brothers from infancy well into adulthood is moving and eloquent; on the other, this

dedication might appear to support Alice Walker's criticism of Faulkner for his portrayal of African-Americans such as the nurturing and uncomplaining Dilsey in The Sound and the Fury as "Physically enslaved but spiritually free." Echoing one strain of Faulkner criticism, Walker claims that Faulkner substitutes for what she would consider more realistic portrayals of black experience "a narrative of endurance, a static, past-oriented framework which replaces the articulate heroes with the 'enduring saint'" (qtd. in Werner, "Minstrel Nightmares" 42). And even though Caroline Barr was slight in stature (Blotner 13), Faulkner's description of her unstinting generosity nonetheless appears to conform to the stereotype of what Barbara Christian calls "the mammy in the unconscious of the south":

> [she] is black in color, fat, nurturing, religious, kind, above all strong, and as Faulkner would call Dilsey, enduring. She relates to the world as an all-embracing figure, and she herself needs or demands little, her identity derived mainly from a nurturing service. (Black Feminist Criticism 2).

Whoever and whatever Caroline Barr may have been exclusive of her role as nurse to Murry and Maud Falkner's children, William Faulkner's dedication of Go Down, Moses to her has the effect of fixing her identity for generations of Faulkner readers as a "nurturing," "all-embracing" figure:

the stereotypical mammy.[1]

But whether or not Faulkner's commemoration of Caroline Barr in Go Down, Moses appears to perpetuate the stereotype of the black mammy, it also raises interesting questions about how we are to read the novel which follows it: as Mary Jane Dickerson asks us to consider, "What does it mean to read a novel with Moses in its title, dedicated to Mammy Caroline Barr, "born in slavery," and with its most significant figure, the slave woman, Eunice, whose existence lies hidden between elliptical inscriptions in farm ledgers penned by barely literate male McCaslins?" (417). Dickerson here draws our attention to another image of African-American motherhood in Go Down, Moses, that of Eunice, the black slave who, according to Ike McCaslin's reading of the commissary records in "The Bear," drowns herself upon learning that her daughter has been impregnated by her own father, their white master. That Eunice herself has conventionally been submerged by Faulkner criticism is apparent when we consider that neither Christian nor Walker, for example, appears to look beyond the obvious stereotypes in Faulkner's work to see the portrayal of black women who, when or if they fail to conform to the stereotype of the black "mammy," remain critically invisible and unheard. Moreover, Faulkner's dedication itself demands to be read in the context of a novel which, in spite of its "masculinist" label,[2] exhibits an intense interest in the possibility of African-

American motherhood and which may, in fact, serve to interrogate the very terms by which Caroline Barr is invoked.

In this chapter, I will employ the tropes of drowning and surfacing that Morrison herself uses to speak about history, writing, and music to guide a reading between Go Down, Moses and Toni Morrison's Beloved. I will attempt to demonstrate that what surfaces in Beloved is an exploration of African-American motherhood that, while it serves to shatter the myths which underwrite many of the depictions of black women in Faulkner's work, also illuminates the strains of ideological repression and denial that lay just beneath the surface of these portrayals and sometimes erupt from them. It will be my contention that, in relation to the work that follows it, Faulkner's fervent dedication of Go Down, Moses to Caroline Barr is "double-voiced" in that it inscribes the anxiety arising from the very paradox inherent in his description of a woman "born in slavery," who devoted her life so unselfishly to that class and race of people who once held her as chattel. The heightened claim which Faulkner makes for the "devotion and love" of his "Mammy" both signals and, since the inscription was a late addition to the novel, echoes the insecurity portrayed in that work vis-à-vis the relationship between the slave or indentured mother and the children entrusted to her care, an insecurity whose shocking ramifications were not fully exploited until Faulkner completed Requiem for a Nun.[3]

What I will first offer here is a re-reading of Go Down, Moses that does not fail to note Faulkner's obvious predisposition to the stereotypical portrayal of black women, but that also discovers moments at which the racist complacency of such projections is severely threatened. Richard Moreland suggests that in the figure of the black mother Faulkner is forced to confront and even question his society's most profound convictions regarding both race and gender:

> In Go Down, Moses . . . Faulkner has turned his attention increasingly toward the figure of the black mother, who serves as a focus and difficult interlocutor for his progressively more radical rereadings and rewritings of his society's constitutive, hierarchical distinctions of class, race, and now especially sexuality and gender, which has proven to be for Faulkner the most difficult, most deeply naturalized, ideological set of distinctions of the three. (194)

Go Down, Moses, I will argue, is a text which simultaneously and paradoxically seeks to define and therefore colonize the experience of black motherhood while it repeatedly and sometimes hysterically confesses the impossibility of doing so from the perspective of a racially white community for whom the terms of black agency, let alone black female agency, are at least unrecognizable, if not completely untenable.

The consequences of this failure on the part of the white community to account for black feminine desire and agency are, as we shall see, profoundly unsettling and disruptive to the hegemonic order.

Whether it was chosen intentionally for this purpose or not, Faulkner's use of the title Go Down, Moses for the collection of material in that novel (its "general theme being the relationship between white and negro races here" (Blotner 427)) and for its final "chapter," affords one way, potentially, of addressing Faulkner's struggle to portray African-American subjectivity. Joseph Blotner, in his biography of Faulkner, suggests that Faulkner's choice of the title may have been yet simply another tribute to Caroline Barr:

> The title [for the story "Go Down, Moses"] came from the spiritual which Faulkner had known all his life, a musical form fresh in his mind from those sung at Mammy Callie's funeral service. (421)

But Blotner goes on to add, apparently without irony:

> Faulkner may have thought of it for another reason. Gone With the Wind had played in Oxford in March, and if Faulkner went to see it, he could not have missed the Negro chorus in the sound track, in the chaos just before the fall of Atlanta, singing "Go Down, Moses." (421)

With this speculative juxtaposition, Blotner inadvertently draws our attention to the multivalent signifying potential of the song Faulkner chose for his title. Surely, the singing of "Go Down, Moses" at a funeral, where it acts in effect as a requiem for the deceased, the words "Let my people go" referring to the release of death, is a striking contrast to its presentation in an enormously popular film which, however nostalgic and sympathetic to the lost cause of the south, charts the demise of slavery.[4] To consider the song in these two contexts is to acknowledge at once both its personal and its political significations, but also to recognize in the novel, and most particularly in the title story, Faulkner's awareness, however limited, of the deep imbrication of the political in the simplest of personal actions performed by members of an African-American community who are deeply conscious of their signifying status and have been made painfully self-conscious of the price of such visibility in a white hegemonic society.

According to James H. Cone, it is precisely this multiplicity (not to mention duplicity), or "double-voicedness" which characterizes most African-American spiritual songs. Cone's argument is that the Christian content of these songs, which seemingly express a good-natured acceptance of suffering and the hope of redemption after death, cannot completely mask, and in fact sometimes helps to encode, an acute and politicized awareness on the

part of the African-American community that "Black slaves were condemned to live in a society where not only the government but 'God' condoned their slavery" (24). As Richard Moreland argues, "the black spiritual as a historical genre has adapted to strategically different, critical purposes the accommodationist white religion which provided many of its terms and (sometimes uneasily) sanctioned its expression" (189). In fact, the tropological and typological resonances of the Christian lexicon in the gospels could easily be "appropriated" by slaves "to their various styles of resistance" (Cone 39).[5]

In essence, Cone argues that African-American spirituals such as "Go Down, Moses" operate subversively within and express the paradox of slave existence: "Under the law . . . slaves were property and persons. But the two definitions together were absurd" (21). DuBois has theorized from this paradox what he calls the African-American's sense of "double consciousness":

> the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the

> tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (DuBois 364)

Profoundly aware of his/her visibility, the African-American, according to DuBois, sees his/her oppressor even more clearly: "I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know" (923). Morrison echoes DuBois when she comments on "the talk of black people" recorded in Drylongso:

> [t]hey say almost to a man that you never tell a white person the truth. He doesn't want to hear it. Their conviction is they are neither seen nor listened to. They also perceive themselves as morally superior because they do see. (Morrison to LeClair 376)

But, as both Morrison and DuBois would no doubt argue, this moral superiority comes at a very high price: the deferral and sublimation of agency which both necessitates and enables a double-voiced discourse, such as that represented by African-American work songs and spirituals, and later blues and jazz,[6] in which resistance can be encoded.

Jacques Lacan's interpretation (via Kojeve) of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, insofar as it provides a psychoanalytic explanation for the way that all intersubjective relationships are governed by the struggle for power and "pure prestige" (but the effects of which are, of

course, much more pronounced in members of a society who have actually experienced institutionalized slavery) is relevant to both the DuBoisian sense of double-consciousness and the paradox of African-American subjugation in white hegemonic society. Lacan theorizes the paradox of slave existence as the exemplum of the alienating vel or aphanasis which marks the impasse of all (inter)subjectivity and out of which arises desire, insofar as this desire is always "the desire of the Other":

> The dialectic of the slave is obviously no freedom without life, but there will be no life without freedom. From one to the other there is a necessary condition. This necessary condition becomes precisely the adequate reasons that, causes [sic] the loss of the original requirement. (Four 216)

In the struggle for "pure prestige," not just recognition, but the awareness of being recognized by someone whose humanity and agency can be fully acknowledged attains a highly privileged status. But, and herein lies the paradox, it is only the slave who attains this status, simply because the master, once having physically subdued the slave and relegated him/her to a sub-human category, cannot feel him/herself to be recognized; while the master can see the slave, he/she cannot see the slave's humanity (desire) and therefore cannot see him/herself seen by the "other." The slave gives up his/her freedom, but the master gives up his/

her desire, since desire is always desire of/for the Other. In calling this paradoxical impasse the alienating vel, Lacan acknowledges its "lethal factor": "your freedom or your life" (Four 213, 212).

To consider the signifying duplicity of the title Go Down, Moses is, then, to raise the possibility that, just as resistance to the hegemonic social structure may be encoded in African-American art forms that borrow from white Christian gospel traditions, Faulkner's appropriation of the African-American spiritual for the novel reinscribes a duplicitous structure that also serves to codify and perhaps therefore to renegotiate relations of power between the races. To extend our speculation regarding his choice of the title for the novel and to consider it in relation to his decision to dedicate Go Down, Moses to "Mammy" Caroline Barr is to suggest the possibility that in the sincere praise and commemoration of his mammy's life, Faulkner may also be expressing the anxiety inherent in the master position of the Hegelian/Lacanian dialectic and may be attempting to situate himself as "seen" and recognized by an African-American whose subjectivity, while essential to this recognition, is placed in jeopardy by the racism of the American South. It would not be surprising, then, in view of Faulkner's dedication, to discover that his uneasiness about race relations may find its most extreme expression in Go Down, Moses in a profoundly ambivalent portrayal of

African-American woman- and/or motherhood.

At first glance, that ambivalence seems not to be projected onto Faulkner's portrayal of Molly Beauchamp, the one character in Go Down, Moses who could be considered exemplary of Caroline Barr. Mediating between culturally white and black worlds in her role as mother and mother surrogate, Molly also appears to be the embodiment of one version of the stereotypical black "mammy": an admirable, strong-willed, seemingly morally unambiguous character who typically offers no real threat to the complacent assumptions of the racist society in which she lives. A central character in Go Down, Moses, Molly provides the link which unifies the collection of short stories from its dedicatory commemoration of maternity to the final, title story which at once celebrates and gently mocks Molly's blind maternal instinct.

It is through his narrative treatment of Molly in "The Fire and the Hearth" that Faulkner can both raise and resolve, if somewhat uneasily, some implications of the paradox suggested in his dedication. In this story, Molly, forced by circumstances to assume the role of housekeeper to the socially superior, white Zack Edmonds and wet nurse to his motherless infant, is confronted with a dilemma when her husband Lucas demands that she return to his hearth. Significantly, Lucas, the son of slaves who share the same white paternal ancestry as Edmonds, is seen to be motivated primarily by pride and by a sexual jealousy that is nonethe-

less as proprietary in its own way as is Zach Edmonds' selfish demand for Molly's services. Although it is clear that what Lucas fears most is Edmonds' sexual exploitation of Molly, the narrative voice makes it equally clear here that Molly's actions are entirely motivated by a maternal instinct that is oblivious to color and blood relations: Lucas wins Molly back, only to find her nursing Edmonds' white son rather than their own. That this outcome is both comforting and comfortable for Faulkner, who was himself reared by a black woman, is suggested in the later ruminations of Carothers (Roth) Edmonds, the white child whom Molly nursed and raised alongside her own Henry. Repeating (or, more precisely, anticipating) almost word for word Faulkner's dedication--"[Molly] who had given him, the motherless, without stint or expectation of reward that constant and abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in this world for him" (GDM 117)--Roth Edmonds also valorizes Molly's maternal role, while necessarily foreclosing the possibility that she is also a fully sexual, desiring being. In early adulthood, Edmonds recognizes that the vaguely hostile relationship between his father and Lucas Beauchamp is fuelled by sexual rivalry, but even as he acknowledges this to himself, he refuses "even [to] think Molly's name" (GDM 115). This anxious separation of mother/lover comes as no surprise to readers of Faulkner, less so perhaps to readers of Freud. In order to resolve the

paradox of slave motherhood, what must be repressed, however much it is implied, is the desire, particularly the sexual desire, of the black woman--she must be seen as essentially agentless and victimized, subjected entirely to a blind, almost primitive, maternal instinct: what Ike in "The Bear" calls the blacks' innate "love of children . . . whether their own or not or black or not" (GDM 295).

In the title story, "Go Down, Moses," Faulkner again appears to explore the theme of the black woman's unconditional maternal love, but this time Molly is Mollie Worsham Beauchamp, the name itself not only more deeply contextualized and colonized--Worsham being the name of her former white owner, Beauchamp the name of her husband--but its spelling slightly altered. While Richard Moreland implies in a footnote that the "change in spelling of Molly/Mollie's name . . . is an oversight on Faulkner's part," its appearance in this story is at least worthy of our speculative inquiry, as Moreland himself then suggests:

> or [it may be significant] as a variation on the theme of naming that runs throughout the novel: naming conceived as a scene alternately of ineluctable repetition and revenge or of more revisionary repetitions and more reciprocal, symbolic exchange. While these blacks often bore the names of their ancestors' white masters, they were not unduly reverent about the audible or

> inaudible spelling of those names, as in Lucas Beauchamp's revision of his given "white" name Lucius . . .; nor did they decline nicknames, as in the case of Lucas' grandson Butch, a tradition suggestively explored in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon. (187n17)

Without entirely disagreeing with Moreland's observation that the change from Molly to Mollie might be just a careless error, I would also argue for its significance to a reading of the text if we consider that Faulkner's renaming of Molly occurs in a story which describes her effort to resituate herself as "mother" in the public (con)text of her grandson's death. Just as the song "Go Down, Moses" signifies private grief and public resistance, Molly/Mollie's "natural" expressions of grief for a grandson gone wrong betray a strategic, deeply political purpose.

Significantly, that grandson himself is described as renamed in the text. As he faces execution, Butch Beauchamp tells the census-taker his full name: "Samuel Worsham Beauchamp." When the census-taker replies, "That's not the name you were sen--lived under in Chicago," Beauchamp quips, "No. It was another guy killed the cop" (GDM 369). With this act of revision, the doomed young man at once reclaims the maternal (and colonized) line of his ancestry, reestablishes an emotional tie to that maternal ancestry--"My grandmother raised me" (GDM 370)--and provides an alibi for

his crime: "It was another guy." It is within this context that we might consider Molly's renaming as a revision of the portrayal of her in "The Fire and the Hearth" as a fully colonized woman unable to abandon her maternal duty to the white infant--Carothers Edmonds--who would not only turn his back on his "foster-brother" (GDM 111) Henry, but who would, much later, "sell" Mollie's grandson "in Egypt" (GDM 380) by driving him off his ancestral land.

Mollie is renamed as well by Gavin Stevens, who provides the focal narrative voice of the story. Stevens repeatedly calls her "Aunty" or "Aunt Mollie" in the traditional manner by which whites patronizingly express affection toward their black elders. But the expression "Aunty," when directed at the black woman, also implies the colonizing "milk" bond with black foster-mothers (Roth Edmonds also uses the term "Aunt Molly" (GDM 120)) and is heavily imbued with racist overtones. So even though Mollie seeks out Gavin Stevens as the person most likely to find her grandson, and even though Stevens is almost single-handedly responsible for raising the funds to bring Butch's body home to her, "Aunt" Mollie cannot hear him call her name as she and her brother Hamp sing their requiem for her "Benjamin": "<u>But she cant hear me</u>, he thought. She was not even looking at him. She never had looked at him" (GDM 380). As Richard Moreland comments, Mollie "will not allow [Stevens] to deny so patronizingly Roth's part (and his own)

in her grandson's story" (189). Thus, while we see Mollie only through Stevens' eyes and hear her only through his ears, her own refusal to listen to him and to see him provide her an alibi too--"It was another 'Aunty'" who went willingly to Zach Edmonds house to nurture the destruction of her own line, and who, when forced to make a choice between someone else's white child and her own black one, chose both, thereby risking "breaking up her home who had no other kin save an old brother in Jefferson . . . and the eighteen-year-old married daughter" (GDM 117), the mother of her dead grandson. It is only Molly's rejection of Stevens' comfort and the expression of her private grief in the "double-voiced" spiritual which encodes it, symbolically establishing her relationship to that grandson and her grandson's relationship to the community, that will resituate her as a true mother in the context of Butch's life, even though it is far too late for this action to make any real difference to either of them.

Moreland insightfully notes that Gavin Stevens' "forced" irony gently mocks Mollie's blind maternal love (189) and prevents both him and us from fully sharing her grief; although I have argued that the Molly of "The Fire and the Hearth" is revised and politicized as Mollie in "Go Down, Moses," the stereotype of the perennially nurturing black woman is left largely intact in that final story: Mollie, after all, is still defined in terms of her maternal

role. But Moreland goes on to say that "'Go Down, Moses' is a story that can be better read and appreciated in the surrounding context of the novel's various histories of willful ironies and denials of mourning, fear, and love" (191). In a similar vein, I would suggest that were Molly Beauchamp the only black woman in Go Down, Moses, Alice Walker might perhaps be justified in dismissing Faulkner's portrayal of black women at least as shallow, if not racist. However, Molly/Mollie is not the only black woman in the text, just the most critically visible, and I will now focus on two episodes in Faulkner's novel in which the presence of the black mother is so profoundly unsettling as to have induced a kind of amnesia in critics of the novel.

Ike McCaslin's reading of the commissary ledgers in "The Bear" is so thematically important not only to that story, but to the entire sequence of stories in Go Down, Moses, that it is surprising how little critical attention has been paid to Eunice, the woman who is reported to have drowned herself after learning that her daughter Tomasina has been impregnated by her own white father. The facts are recorded in the ledger in the form of an incredulous dialogue between the twins, Buck and Buddy McCaslin:

> Eunice bought by Father in New Orleans 1807 $650. Married to Thucydus 1809 Drownd in Crick Cristmas Day 1832
>
> . . .

> June 21th 1833 Drownd herself
>
> . . .
>
> 23 Jun 1833 Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding him self
>
> . . .
>
> Aug 13th 1833 Drownd herself (GDM 267, italics omitted)

While Eunice's suicide perhaps mitigates criticism of Faulkner for his portrayal of all blacks, and particularly of black women, as long-suffering and "enduring," the shocked reaction of Buck and Buddy to her manner of death reminds us of what Frantz Fanon suggests is the mistaken belief among people that "Negroes never commit suicide" (218n6), a misapprehension, even a foreclosure, which serves the dominant ideology. In the Hegelian struggle for recognition and prestige, it is only the suicide of the slave that not only robs the master of her/his labor, but removes her/him from the economy of power relations and resolves the paradox of the dialectic; this action, however, from the point of view of the master, is unthinkable, "the possibility of the impossible" (Fanon 218), because, as the enactment of the irrational death wish, suicide clearly establishes the subjectivity of the slave. Or, as Lacan says, "in the conditions in which someone says to you, <u>freedom or death!</u>, the only proof of freedom that you can have . . . is precisely to choose death, for there, you show

that you have freedom of choice" (Four 213). Eunice's suicide, then, challenges the hegemonic order and provokes a crisis of interpretation for the white community, and particularly for young Ike McCaslin.

It is, arguably, the teen-aged Ike's confused response to Eunice's story--"But why? But why?", itself an echo of his uncle's perplexed "Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding him self" (GDM 267)--that informs Ike's philosophy toward the land and its inhabitants. But in order to understand Ike's response to the information recorded in the ledgers, we must first understand the rhetorical nature of the question itself, since Ike's and his uncles' incredulity obviously reach beyond the known and compelling circumstances of Eunice's suicide. In psychoanalytic terms, Ike's "why" does not so much demand a response as it forecloses the possibility of recognizing the desiring agency of an "other." Like Quentin's difficulty with reconstructing the past in Absalom, Absalom!, Ike's inability to comprehend the actions recorded in the commissary ledger is not effected by a dearth of knowledge, but by an awareness of having access to too much knowledge and by a concomitant desire for the ignorance which will grant him freedom from the past. Lacan explains:

> The desire of the Other is apprehended by the subject in that which does not work, in the lacks of the discourse of the Other, and all the child's

> why's reveal not so much an avidity for the reason of things, as a testing of the adult, a why are you telling me this? ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire. (Lacan, Four 214)

Again, like Quentin's, Ike's renunciation of his own desire to marry and procreate signals a refusal to enter into the enigmatic adult world.

But instead of committing suicide, Ike responds to the incestuous, violent legacy recorded in the ledgers by repeating precisely his ancestor's "act of escaping" (GDM 294). Repudiating ownership of the land of his usurping and colonizing ancestors and refusing to populate that same land with his own white descendants, Ike expresses "the truth of his need to escape" (GDM 294) by living the simple hermetic life of a hunter and by devoting much of his life to tracking down all of his black relatives so that he can pay out the financial legacy left for them by his grandfather. His efforts may be seen as an attempt to close the ledger by paying off the curse inflicted by his ancestors on the land and its people. What Ike cannot prevent, however horrifying the consequence of his failure is to him, are the propagation of the mixed-race line of his family and, worse, their physical escape from that land into freedom and the hope for a better future; in other words, Ike cannot prevent a future which threatens to bring with it total change in

the social structure of the South, the very change against which the South fought and lost a bitter war. In the very difficult central passages of "The Bear," we get some idea of Ike's ambivalence about what he believes will be the effects of abolition on African-Americans:

> those upon whom freedom and equality had been dumped overnight and without warning or preparation or any training in how to employ it or even just endure it and who misused it not as children would nor yet because they had been so long in bondage and then so suddenly freed, but misused it as human beings always misuse freedom, so that he thought Apparently there is a wisdom beyond even that learned through suffering necessary for a man to distinguish between liberty and license; (GDM 290)

More importantly, Ike describes what the threat of abolition meant to "enlightened" white southerners

> who had fought for four years and lost to preserve a condition under which that franchisement was anomaly and paradox, not because they were opposed to freedom as freedom but for the old reasons for which man . . . has always fought and died in wars: to preserve a status quo or to establish a better future one to endure for his children; (GDM 290)

It is just such a conservative, paternalistic view of the relationship between white- and African-Americans that fuels both the compassion and the anger with which Ike, guided only by the instructions and records laid out by his grandfather in the Commissary ledger, obsessively pursues his task of compensation, a task made much more difficult by the recipients' exodus from their homeland and their apparent "ingratitude."

For example, when Ike succeeds in tracking down Fonsiba, who has married a well-educated black northerner and moved to a town named "Midnight," he is shocked by the poverty in which she and her bookish husband live and by the latter's apparent indolence. He rails at them:

> "Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse onto the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can--not resist it, not combat it--maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted. Then your peoples' turn will come because we have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet. Dont you see?" (GDM 278)

Fonsiba's resourceless husband, who, significantly for Ike, wears "lensless spectacles" (GDM 278), responds to Ike's tirade by speaking of his hope for the future, but his words

utterly fail to convince Ike of his prospects. Finally, Ike turns to Fonsiba and asks, "Are you all right?" She responds simply: "I'm free" (GDM 280). Unable to persuade her or her husband to accept her thousand-dollar legacy, Ike nonetheless makes arrangements with a local bank for it to be paid out to her in monthly three-dollar instalments, thus, he believes, ensuring her security, but also, of course, ensuring her dependence on the benevolent white patriarch: the status quo.

Just as incest and miscegenation threaten to short-circuit the McCaslin genealogy, Ike's celibacy and his attempts at forcing atonement seem intended, at least in part, as a means of short-circuiting a potentially redemptive narrative transmission: "So I reckon that [the financial legacy] was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger" (GDM 269). Ike uses his grandfather's legacy in an attempt to ransom the guilt he has inherited from the past, not necessarily to contribute toward the secure and self-determining future of his African-American family. What is at stake for Ike in having to participate in any such transmission will become clearer from a reading of "Delta Autumn."

While the experience of Rider with the ghost of his wife Mannie in "Pantaloon in Black" is, as I will later explain, perhaps the most explicit link between Go Down, Moses and Beloved, it is Eunice's ghost who truly haunts both novels. In the story "Delta Autumn," Roth Edmonds'

unnamed lover, the mother of his infant son, surfaces from the rain as though she has just emerged from Eunice's watery grave, her "face with that immersed contemplation" (GDM 357), her very existence an affront to Ike's mission of atonement and his desire to lay the injustices of the past, finally, to rest. Edmonds' lover is herself a miscegenous, incestuous product of Edmonds' and Ike's family (she is, in fact, as a veritable "return of the repressed," Eunice's great great great granddaughter, a direct descendant of "that one that was its own mother too" (GDM 362)), but because she is well-spoken and fair-skinned, Ike at first assumes that she is white. When he learns the truth about her identity and especially when he discovers that she will not be treated by him or Edmonds as a victim, Ike is overcome with rage and a feeling of helplessness: rage, perhaps because the woman refuses to comply with Ike's stereotype of the black woman; helplessness, perhaps because, in spite of his efforts, he must confront the inevitability of his failure to cancel the legacy of his ancestors. When Ike gives the woman Roth's envelope, she tears it open and scoffs, "That's just money" (GDM 358). Significantly, Roth's lover is the granddaughter of James Beauchamp--Tennie's Jim--who, like Jim Bond in Absalom, Absalom!, "is the one nigger left" (AA 378), the one member of his family whom Ike could not track down and "catch" in order to give him his legacy.

Ike's overt response to these discoveries is a physical revulsion that borders on hysteria:

> He sprang, still seated even, flinging himself backward onto one arm, awry-haired, glaring. Now he understood what it was she had brought into the tent with her, what old Isham had already told him by sending the youth to bring her in to him--the pale lips, the skin pallid and dead-looking yet not ill, the dark and tragic and foreknowing eyes. Maybe in a thousand or two thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now! He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: "You're a nigger!" (GDM 360-61)

To comprehend fully the import of Ike's reaction, we need perhaps to examine readings of this scene by other critics.

The first, that of Sondra O'Neale, is an interesting misreading. O'Neale mistakenly contextualizes the "shock of recognition" scene in Go Down, Moses in terms of a conventional moment in "passing" narratives, the moment at which a young girl who has believed herself to be white discovers, to her horror, that she has some black ancestry. In fact, in this scene the exact opposite is true: Roth's lover is as comfortable with her "color" as she is with the distant blood relationship she shares with Roth Edmonds. She does not attempt to hide these facts either from Ike or from herself. And Ike is not so much shocked to discover these

facts about her so much as he is horrified at his own inability to "read" the outward, visible signs of her identity, either her difference (due to miscegenation) or her sameness (due to incest), neither of which are recorded for his information and reassurance in the now dusty and closed ledger. It is not until she remarks that her aunt "[T]ook in washing" (GDM 360), a remark which encodes her racial identity in terms of socio-economic class, that Ike realizes her "true" identity. The "shock of recognition" is Ike's, not the woman's, and what he recognizes is precisely what Quentin Compson in Absalom, Absalom! refuses to admit: that his way of reading the world is obsolete and that his clear-cut division of people into victims and victimizers, blacks and whites, can no more account for the living desire of Eunice's descendant than it could for Eunice's desire to die. The former's parting words to him--"have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love" (GDM 363)--speak to Ike's failure as a perennial, cultivated, inability to apprehend either agency or desire in the black "other."

Lee Jenkins, on the other hand, criticizes Faulkner's portrayal of the young woman's unequivocal love for the callous Roth Edmonds:

> That she loves Roth we have no doubt. What we feel compelled to ask is why she should love him, even as we know, as she has just pointed out, that

> no one can fathom the power and the secret workings and ways of the heart. Nevertheless, I take her protestations of love, as a black, for a white who dishonorably uses and abuses her and cannot bring himself to allow himself to respect her, as simply one more, though immeasurably more complex, instance of the white need for black forgiveness. It is the metaphorical equivalent of wish fulfilment that no matter what the injury done to the black, it becomes finally canceled and finally meaningless by the reassuring and undaunted capacity of the blacks for love, quite in the manner of Ike's earlier statements in "The Bear" of the ability of the blacks to love all things--children in this instance--whether their own or not, whether black or not. (242-43)

Jenkins raises an excellent point about the way that Faulkner tends to romanticize miscegenation, an issue that I touched on in the previous chapter and will explore again later; however, Jenkins' analogy is false: this young woman's love for Roth is not like the love of "blacks for children"--it is a fully sexual, adult love, consummated and productive--and by asking "why" she should love Roth, in spite of his apparent neglect of her and her child, Jenkins risks casting himself in Ike's role and refusing to acknowledge the existence of an enigmatic desire that thwarts our

attempts to colonize and subdue it. He also fails to consider a reading of that desire which may go beyond racial issues without ignoring them. The woman's desire, I believe, must be read in the context of the impoverished Fonsiba's reply to Ike--"I'm free"--when he expresses a genuine, if patriarchal, concern for the choices she has made.

Like Quentin Compson, for whom Faulkner, not coincidentally, substituted Isaac McCaslin in some of the stories later collected in Go Down, Moses, Ike remains caught within the scopic, specular economy of a racist society. In this economy, the black subject becomes fetishized as a sort of perverse signifying mirror through which whites can see themselves: according to Quentin in The Sound and the Fury, "a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behavior; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among" (TSTF 53); in a similar way Ike McCaslin measures white behaviour against that of the African-American and concludes that they are "better than we are. Stronger than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them" (GDM 294). As we have seen, Ike's argument that the African-American under slavery is somehow morally superior to the white American is used paradoxically and specularly to support the idea that freedom can only corrupt and demean the black man or woman as it has the white.

But, clearly, what makes this economy viable for the

white American is the ability to discern blackness. Faced with the possibility of the disappearance of visual signification (as we have seen, Quentin sounds like a black man, even if he does not look like one), Ike and Quentin respond hysterically when they face the loss not only of a profoundly conservative, specular economy, but of their very identity as white men. Quentin's response to Shreve's threat in Absalom, Absalom! that the Jim Bonds of the world will in time "bleach out again like the rabbits . . . so they won't show up so sharp against the snow"--seems almost mild in comparison to Ike's delayed response to Roth's mistress, with her "toneless pallor" (GDM 359-60):

> he lay shaking faintly and steadily . . ., rigid save for the shaking. This Delta, he thought: . . . This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaires' mansions on Lakeshore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows man-tall in the very cracks of the sidewalks, and usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed

> and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is nor cares. . . . (GDM 364, italics omitted)

It is this subversive possibility--the inversion of some sort of "natural" order through the visual whitening of America after generations of miscegenation--that results in an aching nostalgia and the necessity of foreclosing the desire of the "other," whose love and regard are essential to establishing the subjectivity of the white man, but whose then powerful seduction must be zealously guarded against in order to preserve a status quo which defines one race's humanity against the color of another's skin.

It is little wonder then, that for Faulkner, a man raised in a white racist society by a black woman, the questions and problems of desire should be invested in the figure of "mammy." The scene in "Delta Autumn" between Ike and Roth's unnamed black lover (and mother of his child) must be read in the context of a novel which, almost in spite of itself, dares to expose the deeply problematic relationships between white- and African-Americans in a racist society. Even leaving aside for now the exploration of racism in "Pantaloon in Black," I would argue that, particularly through the portrayal of Roth Edmonds, who has figured more or less prominently in each of the stories examined above, Faulkner provides an auto-critique of the inherent racism in his dedication to Caroline Barr. The

fact that Roth, on the one hand, praises in much the same, sentimentalizing, way his Mammy, Molly Beauchamp, for her unstinting service and "abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in this world for him" (GDM 117)--and, on the other, turns his back repeatedly on the members of her family (who are, of course, part of his own family as well), demonstrates clearly the deep conflicts inherent in the surrogate relationship. That Mollie ultimately rejects and vilifies Roth Edmonds in order to embrace unequivocally her own descendant in the story "Go Down, Moses" speaks powerfully, I think, to Faulkner's own sense of uncertainty about his status in the African-American community and his own worth in their eyes.

Less obviously, perhaps, "Pantaloon in Black" provides another auto-critique of racism in Go Down, Moses. Just as the novel itself, written from a white perspective, cannot help but "frame" and objectify the black subject, "Pantaloon in Black" parodies that structure in its depiction of Rider, a black man whose overt manifestations of uncontrollable grief over the loss of his young wife are shockingly misread by the white community, represented in the story by a deputy who relates to his wife the events leading up to Rider's incarceration and lynching. The deputy confesses his opinion that

> '['niggers'] aint human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they

> can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffalo.' (GDM 154)

But if, as Richard Moreland suggests, the "story might be described as a crisis in interracial literacy" (GDM 171), then it also marks a certain limit to Faulkner's own "interracial literacy," as Moreland goes on to admit: "The dominant discourses of race seem in this story almost hopelessly inadequate to Rider's plight, which becomes therefore almost illegible to the sheriff's deputy, as Faulkner virtually admits that it also threatens to be for him" (GDM 175). The image of the clown-like "Pantaloon" evoked in Faulkner's title strongly implies a visual barrier to understanding between the races, suggesting perhaps that the deputy's response to Rider's actions is only the extreme version of Gavin Stevens' mild racism in "Go Down, Moses." But as we shall see, there are significant differences between the two stories as well, differences which have less to do with the white community's response to African-American grief, than with Faulkner's attempt--and ultimate failure--to contextualize this grief in the black community.

I have already noted that the appearance of the ghost of Mannie, Rider's dead wife in "Pantaloon in Black," provides the most explicit link between Go Down, Moses and

Morrison's Beloved. If I were to pursue this link, I might point out that both Morrison and Faulkner once again use dogs in similar ways--both Rider's mastiff and Sethe's "Here Boy" run off when the ghost appears. But the significance of the story to my intertextual study goes beyond these coincidences to speak to the larger themes of visual and aural signification in the two writers' works. From this perspective, what one "overhears" in "Pantaloon in Black" is the absence of voice, and particularly the absence of song, that is so prominent in the title story, "Go Down, Moses." Not only is the irony which emanates from the white perspective on African-American behaviour doubled in the two stories, but the latter story serves as a commentary on the former. Whereas in "Go Down, Moses," the double-voiced duet of Mollie and Hamp Worsham drives away the intruding gaze of the white Gavin Stevens, in "Pantaloon in Black" Mannie is buried in silence, seemingly almost without ceremony, and Rider evades the grasp and comfort of his aunt to return home, alone, to a haunted, but otherwise empty house. Rider himself is trapped in a scopic economy: on his way home his eyes strain to see for his wife--"he strode on, . . . his body breasting the air her body had vacated, his eyes touching the objects . . . her eyes had lost" (GDM 137); when he gets there, he sees, but cannot hear, the ghost of Mannie. Furthermore, Rider's refusal to be comforted by members of his own family results in the enactment of his

own death wish, expressed as a desire to "quit thinking" (GDM 159), in his drunken, thoughtless murder of a white man named, appropriately, Birdsong.

While the death of "song" in "Pantaloon in Black" should remind us of the powerful invocation of gospel music in the novel's title and in its title story, the ironic perspective of the white community in both stories suggests how the gaze is blind to and submerges what it cannot understand. But what I want to suggest is that the severe crisis of interpretation in "Pantaloon in Black" forecloses even the double-voiced signification of the gospel because Mannie herself escapes signification for Faulkner: she is the only black woman in the novel who is described as neither mother nor daughter and she is therefore unrepresentable in conventional gendered terms, as even the name Man-nie implies. Because his relationship with Mannie was primarily connubial or sexual, rather than filial, Rider's grief is, in effect, "objectless," excessive: it exceeds the mythic structure of black motherhood that Faulkner has imposed on his novel with his dedication to "Mammy" Caroline Barr. We see the potentially dangerous force of this rupture in Faulkner's description of Rider's frantic efforts to bury Mannie:

> the mound seemed to be rising of its own volition, not built up from above but thrusting visibly upward out of the earth itself, until at last the grave, save for its rawness, resembled any other

> marked off without order about the barren plot by shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick and other objects insignificant to the sight but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read. (GDM 135)

Rider's "unreadable" grief occupies the very heart of Go Down, Moses: it mirrors the more or less unreadable faces and actions of other African-American characters in the novel. But if many of the portrayals in this novel point to Faulkner's specular construction of African-American subjectivity, an intertextual reading between the stories which comprise it can lead us to discover the anxiety that is produced by and then underwrites this scopic economy and to speculate on a potentially revisionary gesture toward recognizing and accommodating desire in the "othered" subject. By listening to Faulkner's dialogue with himself in the double-voiced Go Down, Moses, we can discover the aural alterity within his work upon which we might continue to build a reading between it and Morrison's.

Memory believes before knowing remembers, believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. (Light in August 104)

Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze; / strange fruit , hanging from the poplar trees.

Fire and brimstone, all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her--remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that. (Beloved [6])

The past is never dead. It's not even past. (Requiem for a Nun 229)

The music kept us alive, but it's not enough anymore. My people are being devoured. (Morrison to LeClair 371)

Beloved is, in effect, a requiem that is a resurrection. (Rushdy, "Daughters" 9)

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I will turn now from a reading of Go Down, Moses that discovers in it images of burial and resurrection, drowning and surfacing, and that reveals Faulkner's text to be preoccupied, albeit from a white male perspective, with the issues of black womanhood and, especially, of black motherhood, to a reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved. The intertextual economy that binds Morrison's Beloved to Go Down, Moses is not characterized simply by her response to the failure--not just the deputy's, but both Ike's and Gavin Stevens', and perhaps also Faulkner's--to hear the black woman speak (or sing) her desire. What Morrison ultimately demonstrates in Beloved is that the apparent urgency of Ike McCaslin's hysterical question--"But why"--ironically masks an infantile and even narcissistic aversion to having to

listen to any real response, enter into any real conversation, at all. I will attempt to demonstrate here that, by repudiating the validity of Ike's demand and by demonstrating its very threat to narrative in Beloved, Morrison situates her novel in response to Faulkner's text and permits their work to speak together.

By regarding the space occupied by Eunice and her ghostly great granddaughter as the vacancy of the unanswered question, or unspoken desire, it is possible to see that intertextuality arises in this case not precisely from the absence of black feminine desire in Faulkner's work, but from its active submergence; in other words, from the mystification of that desire by some of Faulkner's white male characters as a means of denying its potentially disruptive force. When Morrison on the one hand valorizes the integrity of Faulkner's "gaze" and on the other complains that "There was this vacancy in the literature I had any familiarity with and the vacancy was me, or the women that I knew" (Interview by Davis 419), we are compelled to redefine the relationship between her work and that of Faulkner in a way that acknowledges the bankruptcy of the gaze and quite literally reaffirms what Julia Kristeva has claimed to be the revolutionary potential of intertextuality to produce "a new articulation of the thetic--or enunciative and denotative positionality" (Revolution 60). Such a transformation, according to Tillotama Rajan,

> is not the replacement of an already existing system by a new one, for intertextuality is precisely the site of our recognition that signifying systems have no positive authority because they are transformation surfaces in which writing is simultaneously a rereading of itself. A literary structure, according to Kristeva, "does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure." (65)

What this means, I think, is not precisely what Mary Jane Dickerson suggests is the ability of Morrison's texts to "help us to expand the many stories of the women on the periphery of Go Down, Moses" (426), but rather their tendency to reread, repeat, and therefore expose the projected racial and gender identifications in Faulkner's texts in order to reinscribe the locus of the desiring subject.

In keeping with the two analogies I have attempted to use for intertextuality--the Lacanian psychoanalytic encounter and jazz--I would suggest that Morrison's texts do not, and indeed cannot, respond to the demand created by the mystification of black feminine desire in Faulkner's work with anything like an answer; they do not seek to replace the silent, occulted black figure in Faulkner's texts with one who will confess all of the secrets of her desire, but instead to displace, through repetition, interrogation, and recontextualization, the enunciative positions from which

the question speaks itself and from which desire emanates, thereby allowing the "work of ideological transformation" (Rajan 64) to begin.

What such work requires is that, rather than evading the very problematic ideological issues pertaining to the mythical representation of African-American motherhood in hegemonic cultural forms, as some critics have accused Alice Walker of doing, Morrison must openly and radically confront the stereotypes of the black mother, much as she claims to have done in all her previous work about black women:

> . . . I was very interested in how contemporary black women looked at the stereotype of black women. Did they accept that role? Did the writers believe, in the works we studied, that that was pretty much the way we were? Were there characters representative of the mammy, whore, whatever? (Stepto and Morrison 390)[7]

It was not until Beloved, however, that Morrison dared to expose the ideological burdens and contradictions inherent in the "mammy" figure and to allow the disruptive force of those contradictions to surface and erupt on the page.

The idea for Beloved came to Morrison through her reading of historical accounts of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who, in 1856, murdered her infant daughter when her family was threatened with recapture. The horrifying details are captured in one contemporary account:

> . . . Margaret Garner, seeing that their hopes of freedom were vain, seized a butcher knife that lay on the table, and with one stroke cut the throat of her little daughter. . . . She then attempted to take the life of the other children and to kill herself, but she was overpowered and hampered before she could complete her desperate work. (Lerner 61)

Describing the genesis of the novel, Morrison reveals in a classic understatement the horrible paradox it chronicles:

> I started out wanting to write a story about the feeling of Self. Women feel themselves best through nurturing. The clipping about Margaret Garner stuck in my head. I had to deal with this nurturing instinct that expressed itself in murder. (qtd. in Jackson 139)

The Margaret Garner story, hardly more than a footnote in American history, presented Morrison with an enormous challenge: how to convey the humanity of a woman who could commit so desperate an act as the murder of her own child.

Morrison's interest in the Margaret Garner story, however, was less archaeological than imaginative:

> I did research about a lot of things in this book in order to narrow it . . ., but I did not do much research on Margaret Garner other than the obvious stuff, because I wanted to invent her life, which

> is a way of saying I wanted to be accessible to anything the characters had to say about it. Recording the life as lived would not make me available to anything that might be pertinent. (Darling and Morrison 5)

As another intertext in Beloved, the story of Margaret Garner--even just "the obvious stuff"--is just as relevant or pertinent for what Morrison chose to leave out of her novel as it is for what she chose to put in it. But to situate more specifically this particular intertext, I would like again to cast a wider net and to allude once more to Morrison's Master's thesis, "Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner's Treatment of the Alienated." What I wish to point up briefly in relation to these two intertexts is that while Morrison's early involvement with both Faulkner's and Woolf's work focused on the issues of alienation and suicide, particularly suicide by drowning, it is the report of Margaret Garner's attempted suicide, by drowning,[9] that she almost entirely suppresses in her retelling of the Margaret Garner story. The runaway Garner, like Sethe, slit the throat of her baby daughter when threatened with recapture. However, unlike Sethe, who is jailed and ultimately freed in Morrison's story, Garner was sold downriver and, during the journey, either fell or threw herself from the boat with another child, who was drowned. Whether the act was intentional or not, Garner was reported (by an unsym-

pathetic white press, of course) to have been glad for the death of her child and, in turn, expressed hope for an end to her own tragic life (Lerner 60-63).

Even though Morrison has argued that she deliberately distanced herself from the documentary sources of the Garner story, I nonetheless find it compelling that she deviates from those aspects of it that comprise precisely the most important elements of her critical work on Woolf and Faulkner. More than interesting, Morrison's deviation is telling, potentially indicative of her feminist revision not only of Faulkner, but of a racist, phallocentric literary tradition in which the expression of feminine desire or manifestations of feminine agency must be either sublimated or submerged. For if drowning is absent from her text, images of water--and surfacing from water--are ubiquitous. Denver is born on and in water; Beloved arises from water; in a parody of birth, Sethe voids massive amounts of water when her murdered child returns to haunt her. In 1976, well before she started Beloved, Morrison told Robert Stepto:

> . . . I read those slave narratives--there are sometimes three or four sentences of half a page, each one of which could be developed in an art form, marvelous. Just to figure out how to--you mean to tell me she beat the dogs and the man and pulled a stump out of the ground? Who is she, you know? Who is she? It's just incredible. And all

> of that will surface, it will surface, and my huge joy is thinking that I am in some way part of that . . . . ("Intimate Things" 395)

If, as Morrison claimed in her Yoknapatawpha address, "With Faulkner, there was always something to surface" (297), and if, coincidentally, the voice of Jason Compson--"It's just incredible"--surfaces in this very quotation, is it not possible that, in the figure of Beloved, what surfaces along with "the sixty million" alluded to in the text's dedication are the voices of those silenced and often nameless black female figures in literature, some of whom are represented in Faulkner's Go Down, Moses? Again, it is not my intention to find exact parallels between the texts, but rather to sketch with broader strokes the way that Morrison recasts the specular encounters found in Faulkner to suggest new ways of thinking of intersubjectivity. That she does so (as she did in Song of Solomon) in the context of a mostly segregated black community rather than the somewhat more integrated, if still deeply conflicted, community of Faulkner's Go Down, Moses does not, I think, diminish the comparison, but rather suggests that part of Morrison's revisionary impact is precisely in her recognition that the specularity that often governs inter-racial relationships and that is fundamental to the ideological construction of race and gender is not confined merely to those inter-racial relationships, nor is it the exclusive psychic territory of

the white race: at least part of the project of situating African-American subjectivity in white hegemonic culture is to shift the psychic terrain from an (always) reactive white culture to a no less ideologically-informed, psychically complex black community.

What I will argue here is that, in Beloved, Morrison explores from an African-Americanist perspective much the same terrain of inherited guilt and personal freedom that Faulkner traverses in Go Down, Moses. This perspective not only pushes the Faulknerian paradox of black maternity to its extreme and unthinkable limit, but it also attempts to move us, as readers, beyond questions of personal motivation and culpability toward a consideration of the possibility that it is desire itself--not its definable objects or aims, whichever of these might be considered answerable or accountable in satisfying it--which must be suppressed, submerged, or just completely ignored and effaced in the ideologically colonized subject. In Beloved, Morrison chronicles the horrible consequences of such suppression when one woman's only chance for freedom and her "too-thick" love coalesce to erupt in an act of violence which, like suicide, provides one of the only logical responses of an ideologically burdened subject to the insane institution of American slavery.

As Faulkner does with the character of Rider in Go Down, Moses' "Pantaloon in Black," Morrison situates the

extreme actions of one African-American--Margaret/Sethe Garner--in relation to a judgmental and punitive white community which cannot "read" and comprehend the logic of these actions. Rider's virtual "suicide," or what at least might be called his overpowering will to cease to exist when he finds that he cannot cope without his beloved, Mannie, is, of course, an aspect of the Margaret Garner intertext that is written out of Beloved. But Morrison's real challenge to the heavily ironized white response to Rider's actions in "Pantaloon in Black" is to widen the societal context to develop more fully the response of an African-American community which, while it shares Sethe's burden of oppression, can no more understand her brutal actions than can the white community, and which is at first, therefore, even less ready to forgive, perhaps because it is powerless to punish her for them. In this way, Morrison's Beloved can be seen to revision the Faulknerian tendency to cast racial difference as the ultimate barrier to intersubjectivity without, at the same time, denying the powerful ideological effects of racism on both the colonizing white- and the externally and internally colonized African-Americans who live under its sway.

Morrison's novel, then, not only participates in an intertextual economy with Go Down, Moses, it repeats that very economy first within its own textual history and then within its own textual space and reception. Like the white

community of Jefferson in "Pantaloon in Black," Toni Morrison confronted an enigma when she encountered the story of Margaret Garner. Unlike that community, however, Morrison was compelled and in turn forces us to look beyond the sensational details of the story and to discover in it the desire and agency of an African-American woman whose tragic and decisive action challenges comprehension not because she is a woman or a mother or black, and therefore supposedly inscrutable, or even because the very terms by which white society defines black motherhood render her identity paradoxical, but rather because Garner's story demands to be situated in a narrative which at least attempts to accommodate the expression of her desire. That narrative, in turn, demands to be contextualized in and heard by a community that must learn to accept the existence of that desire as something unaccountable to their demands, but somehow shared and therefore not entirely recondite. Morrison has argued that her novel is not "about slavery":

> When I say Beloved is not about slavery, I mean the story is not slavery. The story is these people--these people who don't know they're in an era of historical interest. They just know they have to get through the day. I deal with five years of terror in a pathological society, living in a bedlam where nothing makes sense. . . . But these people are living in that situation, and

> they survive it--and they are trying desperately to be parents, husbands and a mother with children. (Jackson 139)

My reading does not dispute this. Quite to the contrary, I would argue that Morrison's work does less to expand our understanding of the brutal institution of slavery than it does to remind us that the lives and desires of those who managed to endure its subjection and the deaths of those who did not somehow overflow the sociological dams that would contain them.

It is not, therefore, surprising that what surfaces in Beloved is precisely unmediated desire itself, embodied amorphously in the mysterious phantom of Sethe's murdered daughter, described as a "fully dressed woman" who "walked out of the water" (Bel [50]). The connections that Morrison makes between the character of Beloved and water are, as I have indicated above, pervasive and almost inexplicable except in terms of literary and historical intertexts, one of which, I have suggested, is the suicidal drowning of Eunice recorded in "The Bear" and the "surfacing" of her descendant in "Delta Autumn." At times in Beloved, Morrison appears to use the trope of drowning to signify nothing less than the horrible history of the slave trade and slavery itself. Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, sums it up: "There's more of us they [white people] drowned than there is all of them ever lived from the start of time" (Bel [244]).

Beloved's description of her life in death provides graphic support:

> We are not crouching now we are standing but my legs are like my dead man's eyes I cannot fall because there is no room to the men without skin are making loud noises I am not dead the bread is sea-colored I am too hungry to eat it the sun closes my eyes those able to die are in a pile I cannot find my man the one whose teeth I have loved a hot thing the little hill of dead people a hot thing the men without skin push them through with poles the woman is there with the face I want the face that is mine they fall into the sea which is the color of the bread (Bel 211)

Evoking images of crowded slave ships and cruel white men ("the men without skin"), water here, particularly the sea, signifies death; however, the sea is also "the color of the bread," therefore suggesting life-bestowing qualities, as does Beloved's incredible thirst for fresh water: "The woman gulped water from a speckled tin cup and held it out for more. Four times Denver filled it, and four times the woman drank as though she had crossed a desert" (Bel 51). Beloved also speaks at times of her mother going away from her into the water: "the woman with my face is in the sea" (Bel 211); "she goes in the water with my face" (Bel [212)]. Some-

thing of the ambiguity with which the trope of water operates in Beloved is implied in Sethe's name, which obliquely points at a classical intertext: the river Lethe, the river of forgetfulness located in the Greek underworld Hades.

Water in Beloved, then, signifies in a very complex and overdetermined way the space of death and loss as well as the possibility of life: like the Civil War graves to which Judith refers in Absalom, Absalom!, the sea "would be full already. Glutted. Like a theater, an opera house, if what you expect to find is forgetting, diversion, entertainment; like a bed already too full if what you want to find is a chance to lie still and sleep and sleep and sleep" (AA 128). And like the graves in Absalom, Absalom!, the glutted sea throws up its dead in Beloved in what Morrison calls "rememory," the tangible, unsought but not unavoidable, thought-pictures of the past:

> Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place--the picture of it--stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. (Bel [36])

Morrison stresses the visual aspect of "rememory" and, significantly, even though Sethe tells Denver that she must

never return to Sweet Home because of the possibility of meeting a horrible episode from the past, Sethe herself is deceived by a thought-picture that she encounters on the day of Paul D's arrival:

> Then something. The plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her--remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her rememory for that. (Bel [6])

Sethe's "rememory"--like the "devil's confusion" that Paul D says keeps him looking "good" but feeling "bad" (Bel 7)--continues to deceive her, as when in the climax of the novel she misrecognizes Bodwin, who is coming to pick up Denver to take her to her job in town, as Schoolteacher, coming "into

her yard and . . . coming for her best thing" (Bel 262).

But it is, of course, Beloved herself who comprises the most obvious "rememory" in the text and who, arising physically from a sea of the drowned, tempts her mother to return there with her:

> When I put that headstone up I wanted to lay in there with you, put your head on my shoulder and keep you warm, and I would have if Bugler and Howard and Denver didn't need me, because my mind was homeless then. I couldn't lay down with you then. No matter how much I wanted to. I couldn't lay down nowhere in peace, back then. Now I can. I can sleep like the drowned, have mercy. She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine. (Bel [204])

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies. (Song 6.3)

'All right. Go on: Promiscuity. Violence. Instability and lack of control. Inability to distinguish between mine and thine--' and he
'How distinguish, when for two hundred years mine did not even exist for them?' (GDM 294)

This here Sethe talked about safety with a handsaw. This here new Sethe didn't know where the world stopped and she began. (Beloved [164])

Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.
Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.
We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? (Song 8.6-8)

Better far this nameless void that stops my life than a sea of sorrow for you. (DuBois 510)

In the relationship between Sethe and Beloved, Morrison dramatizes the symbiotic bond between mother and child which is idealized (if always threatened) in Faulkner; however, the movement in Morrison's novel, as it is in Song of Solomon and The Bluest Eye, is from specularity to an aural shattering of the mirrored image that in Faulkner's work not only entraps and enslaves even the "free" black woman, but that serves to separate her from the larger black community. In other words, Morrison explores the ideologically-charged concept of black maternity in Beloved to reconnect black women to themselves, to each other, to black men, and to their history, a history that has, in effect, doubly colonized them:

> At the center of [the construct of essence of Afro-American motherhood] is the truth that mothers during slavery did not have a natural right to their children and did everything, including giving up their lives, to save them. From this truth, however, a moral dictum has developed, a moral voice that demands that Afro-American mothers, whatever the changed circumstances of their lives, take on the sole responsibility of children. (Christian, Black Feminist Criticism 238-9)

Such a view of African-American motherhood, as Christian implies, feeds the myth of the nurturing, self-sacrificing, "all-embracing" black woman that both African- and white-American writers have long perpetuated, while it denies the specificity of the black woman's own "lacks," her own desire. With her portrait of Sethe Garner, whose only crimes were that she thought she had milk enough for all her babies and that she "didn't know where the world stopped and she began" (Bel [164]), Morrison first portrays the crippling effects of what Christian calls the "moral dictum," taken to its logical, if paradoxical, extreme, and then shows how that demand might be challenged in narrative so that the black woman can reclaim/reauthor the specifity of her desire.

If what Faulkner must carefully manage in Go Down,

Moses, in order to preserve the myth of the black woman's self-sufficiency, is the precarious separation of the black woman's maternal and sexual roles, it is precisely this separation that Morrison initially draws our attention to and whose effects she traces and challenges in the structure of the novel Beloved. It is no coincidence that the physical manifestation of a fully grown, fully sexual Beloved follows closely on the arrival at 124 Bluestone of the last living "Sweet Home" man, Paul D, who not only physically chases the "baby ghost" out of the house, but threatens to "dispossess" the ghost's emotional hold on Sethe and her home until Beloved literally takes physical possession of him too.

Paul D unleashes the past for Sethe in a very literal way, but his arrival also reawakens her sexual desire and the tentative possibility of a future for him, Sethe, and her remaining daughter Denver, a future imaged in "the three shadows that shot out of their feet to the left [holding] hands" as they make their way home from the carnival: Sethe finds herself thinking, "A life. Could be" (Bel 47). With Paul D's arrival, Sethe is forced to remember time itself, not only a past that she has tried hard to forget, but a future that depends on keeping that history repressed:

> To Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay. The 'better life' she believed she and Denver were living was simply not that other one.

> The fact that Paul D had come out of 'that other one' into her bed was better too; and the notion of a future with him, or for that matter without him, was beginning to stroke her mind. As for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered. (Bel [42])

The unexpected arrival of the girl who calls herself Beloved will later revise Sethe's picture of the future by offering the possibility that the events of the past never happened:

> If her boys came back one day, and Denver and Beloved stayed on--well, it would be the way it was supposed to be, no? Right after she saw the shadows holding hands at the side of the road hadn't the picture altered? And the minute she saw the dress and shoes sitting in the front yard, she broke water. Didn't even have to see the face burning in the sunlight. She had been dreaming it for years. (Bel [132])

The seductive pull of the [Imaginary] past, as opposed to hope for the [Symbolic] future, appears to become even stronger when Paul D, deeply ashamed of having been seduced by Beloved and shocked to learn the truth of Sethe's past actions, leaves her:

> Obviously the hand-holding shadows she had seen on the road were not Paul D, Denver and herself, but

> 'us three.' . . . And since that was so--if her daughter could come back home from the timeless place--certainly her sons could, and would, come back from wherever they had gone to. (Bel [182])

But while Beloved at first represents for Sethe an opportunity to atone for the past thereby putting it to rest, it becomes clear that no amount of atonement or self-abnegation--mothering, in its most totalizing, or phallic, sense--on Sethe's part will be sufficient to appease Beloved or to permit Sethe to resume her place as a desiring subject in the adult community. Just as Sethe must conclude, on the basis of evidence to the contrary, that her own mother could not have willingly abandoned her, because "nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter, would she?" (Bel 203), she must reject her own history and her own desire through the re-enactment of a selfless motherhood. Beloved brings the "timeless place" with her and, in this pre-historical space, there can, of course, be no future for Sethe, "no world outside my door" (Bel [184]).

The timeless world that Beloved seeks to (re)institute, as Sethe implies, is the pre-Oedipal space of the womb, of narcissistic, Imaginary relationships, the world of demand, which can be explained in Lacanian terms:

> Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfaction it calls for. It is demand manifested in the primordial relation to the mother,

> pregnant with that Other to be situated within the needs that it can satisfy. Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love.
>
> In this way, demand annuls (aufhebt) the particularity of everything. . . . (Écrits 286)

Since, as Elizabeth Grosz explains, "Demand initiates the child into the categories and terms of discourse, but it does not position the subject in a stable enunciative position as a speaker or discursive 'I'," (66), Beloved's corporeal instability, her constant awareness that "she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces" (Bel [133]), situates her in the disorganized, preoedipal world, the world of demand before it has passed, through what Lacan calls "the defiles of the signifier," into desire. It is a world in which stories may be told, but no hearing/healing takes place, a world of accusation and recrimination in which no excuse will satisfy the child's demand to know "why": not even why she was murdered, but why Sethe abandoned her, the "why" which characterizes the child's "first testing of the adult," Lacan says, "ever-resuscitated from its base, which is the enigma of the adult's desire":

> The first object [the subject] proposes for this parental desire whose object is unknown is his own loss--Can he lose me? The phantasy of one's own death, of one's own disappearance, is the first object that the subject has to bring into play in this dialectic. (Lacan, Four 214)

Whereas normally, according to Lacan, "this dialectic ["insofar as it creates the link between the desire of the subject and the desire of the Other"] now passes through the fact that the desire is not replied to directly" (Four 215), for Beloved and Sethe the dialectic is arrested in the narcissistic dyad of mother-daughter in which the child's initial demand, Beloved's demand for "the join" (Bel 213) --"I am not separate from her there is no place where I stop" (Bel [210])--is supported by her mother's anxious willingness to comply, even if that compliance results in her own death, her own loss of self:

> Dressed in Sethe's dresses, [Beloved] stroked her skin with the palm of her hand. She imitated Sethe, talked the way she did, laughed her laugh and used her body the same way down to the walk, the way Sethe moved her hands, sighed through her nose, held her head. Sometimes . . . it was difficult for Denver to tell who was who. (Bel 241)

While Barbara Rigney claims that "[t]he merging of identities in the preoedipal bonding of the female triad is

universal in Morrison's work but most pronounced in Beloved" (48), I would argue that, according to Lacanian mathematics, the preoedipal is never the world of the triad.

The conditions that are described in 124 Bluestone after the departure of Paul D are no exception to the Lacanian rule. Sethe's guilt not only prevents her from mothering Denver, it also precludes her reinstating the proper symbolic relationship between herself and Beloved, as Denver recognizes:

> [Beloved] was not like them. She was wild game, and nobody said, Get on out of here, girl, and come back when you get some sense. Nobody said, You raise your hand to me and I will knock you into the middle of next week. Ax the trunk, the limb will die. Honor thy mother and father that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. (Bel [242])

If, as Lacan argues, "desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference which results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of this splitting" (Écrits 287), it is precisely Beloved's insatiable demand for the "join," her rejection of the all too literal "split" between her and her mother, and Sethe's eager willingness to meet that impossible demand, that threaten Sethe's ability to claim her own desire and indeed her very life. Lacan explains the role of

desire in constituting the subjectivity of the individual:

> In the final analysis, by refusing to satisfy the mother's demand, is not the child demanding that the mother should have a desire outside him, because the way toward the desire that he lacks is found there? (Écrits 264)

From this premise, Lacan concludes that "man's desire is the desire of the Other," a conclusion that

> concerns a quite different function from that of the primary identification . . . for it does not involve the assumption by the subject of the insignia of the other, but rather the condition that the subject has to find the constituting structure of his desire in the same gap opened up by the effect of the signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him, in so far as his demand is subjected to them. (Écrits 264)

Normally, this gap is opened up by the father and by the signifying effect of the phallus, but Morrison offers a motivated and compelling revision of the phallocentric nuclear family in Beloved by suggesting that it is Denver, Sethe's daughter, who initiates the intervention, and the community itself who rescues Sethe, even if it is, ultimately, Paul D who must help her pick up and reorder the pieces of her shattered life.

"Cut out" from Sethe's and Beloved's games after the

first bloom of their isolation wears off, Denver eventually realizes that Sethe is literally being consumed by maternal guilt and by the insatiable gaze and demand of Beloved; she recognizes, in truly Lacanian fashion, that the two terms of the binary structure are self-cancelling, that the dyad cannot sustain itself:

> Whatever was happening, it only worked with three--not two--and since neither Beloved nor Sethe seemed to care what the next day might bring (Sethe happy when Beloved was; Beloved lapping devotion like cream), Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help. (Bel 243)

When Denver steps "off the edge of the world" (Bel 243) to seek help for her mother,[9] she goes to Lady Jones, the woman who, years before, had taught her to write. So just as Sethe had murdered Beloved to be sure that Schoolteacher would never be able to "list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper" (Bel 251), Denver's desire to acquire and master language enables her twice to escape the suffocation of 124 Bluestone and this decision ultimately frees her mother from the insatiable demands of a murdered daughter.

Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined. (Beloved [190])

For the Afro-American . . . self-creation and reformation of a fragmented familial past are endlessly interwoven: naming is inevitably genealogical revisionism. All of Afro-American literature may be seen as one vast genealogical poem that attempts to restore continuity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of black presence in America." (Benston 152)

When you know your name, you should hang on to it, for unless it is noted down and remembered, it will die when you do. (Song of Solomon 333)

Like the image of water, the trope of writing in Beloved signifies in complex and sometimes even contradictory ways. Sethe's illiteracy and her revulsion at the colonizing effects of the written word as it is employed by Schoolteacher to dehumanize the slaves at Sweet Home are somewhat mitigated by her husband's, Halle's, pride in his literacy, and her youngest daughter's delight in the "capital *w*, the little *i*, the beauty of the letters in her name" (Bel [102)]. Nowhere, of course, is the ambivalence about written language more strikingly clear than in the engraving of a single word on the "crawling-already?" baby's tombstone, each letter of which is dearly, nauseatingly bought by Sethe's sexual submission to the engraver.

What is seldom noted as having significance, however, perhaps because it is so obvious a point, is that "Beloved" is not the name of the murdered child. Beloved is the title inscribed on the cover of the novel and is its final whispered word. Beloved is a word repeated in Morrison's epi-

graph, taken from Romans 9:25, which reads: "I will call them my people, / which were not my people; / and her beloved, / which was not beloved." Beloved is the word inscribed on the murdered infant's gravestone, and Beloved is the self-professed name of the mysterious girl who appears on Sethe's doorstep. But if Beloved takes her name from the inscription on her tombstone, Sethe has first taken the word, out of context, from the first words of the conventional funeral invocation, "Dearly Beloved, we are gathered . . .," an invocation which uses the word Beloved to address the mourners, not the departed.

Beloved, I would argue, exists <u>in language</u> somewhere between the anonymous (but not nameless) infant and the costly but incomplete epitaph that she claims as her name, neither as person nor "haint," but as an intertextual site, what Michael Riffaterre calls a "syllepsis" or a "trope consisting in the simultaneous presence of two meanings for one word" "which generates . . . a text in which the repressed meaning reappears in various guises" ("Intertextual Unconscious" 375). What is repressed by or lost in Morrison's allusion to Romans is the compelling significance and resonance of the lyrical Canticles of Solomon: "Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; <u>but</u> mine own vineyard have I not kept" (Song 1.6). What is repressed by the visible,

specular apparition of the young woman who calls herself Beloved is the aural invocation of the community which is asked, during the funeral service, to take responsibility not for the dead, but for the living, not for an irrevocable past, but for an endurable future.

Morrison's variation on Ike McCaslin's response to the dehumanizing, racist history of America is nowhere more evident than in her treatment of the response of the community to Sethe's "unspeakable" act and the healing revision of that response when Sethe's very existence is threatened by the past. While no-one in the community to which Sethe flees is responsible for the horrible events of "the Misery," each of them at some point learns that he or she cannot evade responsibility for Beloved, whose very name implicates them in the process of helping Sethe to bury the past. Instead of welcoming Sethe home after her stint in jail, though, the community shuns her; Ella's response is typical: "She understood Sethe's rage in the shed . . . but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was prideful, misdirected, and Sethe herself too complicated. When she got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone, Ella junked her and wouldn't give her the time of day" (Bel [257]). But while Ella's uncharitable attitude toward Sethe contributes to Sethe's isolation after "the Misery," it is Stamp Paid's apparently well-intentioned intervention that precipitates Sethe's total abandonment.

In the figure of Stamp Paid, Morrison revises not just Faulkner's portrayal of Lucas Beauchamp in Go Down, Moses, but also his portrayal of Isaac McCaslin. While the former connection may appear to be stronger--both Stamp Paid and Lucas face a difficult decision when their white "masters" demand the services of their respective wives--Faulkner's somewhat idealized and romanticized solution to the problem seems not to pertain to the same American south described by Morrison. What Faulkner politely terms miscegenation, Morrison is not afraid to call rape; whereas Lucas, free but subjugated nonetheless, answers his own question--"How to God . . . can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife?" (GDM 59)--by holding a knife at Zack Edmonds' throat, Morrison's novel depicts a society in which slave mothers can only retaliate against their rapists by abandoning the rapists' children and in which both a slave named Joshua and his wife immediately recognize the utter futility of questioning, let alone resisting, the white man's demand for the "use" of the black woman.

Like Beloved, Stamp Paid compensates for this horrible depravity by recreating himself through renaming:

> Born Joshua, he renamed himself when he handed over his wife to his master's son. Handed her over in the sense that he did not kill anybody, thereby himself, because his wife demanded he stay alive. . . . With that gift, he decided that he

> didn't owe anybody anything. Whatever his obligations were, this act paid them off. (Bel [184]-85)

But while Stamp Paid acknowledges that he could easily have become a dangerously free man--like Cholly Breedlove or Joe Christmas--he discovers instead a way to use his debtlessness:

> He thought it would make him rambunctious, renegade--a drunkard even, the debtlessness, and in a way it did. But there was nothing to do with it. . . . It didn't seem much of a way to live and it brought him no satisfaction. So he extended this debtlessness to other people by helping them pay out and off whatever they owed in misery. (Bel [184]-85).

What Stamp Paid eventually discovers is exactly the same thing that Ike McCaslin in Go Down, Moses must learn: that as long as desire, and therefore the promise of a future, exist, the debt can never be paid out in full and cancelled. Lacan explains:

> Doing things in the name of the good, and even more in the name of the good of the other, is something that is far from protecting us not only from guilt but also from all kinds of inner catastrophes. To be precise, it doesn't protect us from neurosis and its consequences. If analysis

> has a meaning, desire is nothing other than that which supports an unconscious theme, the very articulation of that which roots us in a particular destiny, and that destiny demands insistently that the debt be paid, and desire keeps coming back, keeps returning, and situates us once again in a given track, the track of something that is specifically our business. (Seminar VII 319)

Ike discovers this when Roth Edmond's lover surfaces from the rain, when Fonsiba tells him "I'm free"; Stamp Paid learns his lesson when he takes it upon himself to set Paul D straight about Sethe's crime, thereby ruining "her one shot . . . [at] happiness" (Bel [169]).

The kind of economy described and acted upon by Stamp Paid and Isaac McCaslin is profoundly conservative: Stamp Paid and Ike would like to believe that, while old debts are paid, new ones are not accruing; they would like to be able to answer the demands of the past through renunciation and sacrifice without fully realizing that even such altruism itself partakes of the machinery of desire, insofar as the ego struggles to resist it:

> egoism is quite content with a certain altruism, altruism of the kind that is situated on the level of the useful. And it even becomes the pretext by means of which I can avoid taking up the problem

> of the evil I desire, and that my neighbor desires also. That is how I spend my life, by cashing in my time in a dollar zone, ruble zone or any other zone, in my neighbor's time, where all the neighbors are maintained equally at the marginal level of reality of my own existence. (Lacan, Seminar VII, 187)

While Stamp Paid's altruism strongly links him to the members of his community, who literally open their doors in gratitude to him, it also serves to close him off from them morally; for example, he realizes too late that "the high tone he took" with Baby Suggs after the Misery resulted in "his refusal to see the effect of the marrow weariness in a woman he believed was a mountain" ([180]). We have seen how, in much the same way, Ike vaguely recognizes the moral imperative of his own act of repudiation and compensation as little better than a moral dodge:

> he couldn't speak even to McCaslin, even to explain his repudiation, that which to him too, even in the act of escaping (and maybe this was the reality and the truth of his need to escape) was heresy: so that even in escaping he was taking with him more of that evil and unregenerate old man. . . . (GDM 294)

While neither Ike nor Stamp Paid pursues his goal of compensation explicitly as a means of gaining the moral high

ground, each at some level realizes that his obsessive actions partake of precisely the same patriarchal attitude as those of the slaveholders, an attitude that will always prevent them from acknowledging a common humanity with the oppressed.

But whereas Ike cannot use the knowledge he gains from his encounters with the other's desire, Stamp Paid wonders if "Perhaps . . . he had misnamed himself and there was yet another debt he owed" ([Bel 184]). With Stamp Paid's recognition, Morrison offers a radical revision of the Faulknerian dilemma of exorcising the past. Whereas many of Faulkner's characters, such as Quentin and Shreve in Absalom, Absalom!, attempt to answer the demand of the past in endless, mirroring narratives that repeat the past in order to master it, to pay the debt and lay it once and for all to rest, Morrison repeats such an economy in Beloved to suggest, as the failure of these characters implies, not only that this demand is not answerable, but that such an economy itself is flawed, because it rejects the metonymic effects of desire. While through much of Beloved Morrison confronts and explores the "textual neurosis" of narrative repetition, ultimately she suggests a way out of the specular economy of Faulkner's texts in the aural/oral response of a community whose solidarity is informed not by identity and identification, but by the recognition of difference and one's own alienation from the other, through

what Donald Spence (via Shoshana Felman) calls the spiralling pattern of "narrative recursion," as opposed to "repetition" ("Narrative recursion" 192).

The virtually simultaneous arrival of Paul D and Beloved at 124 Bluestone provides, as I have suggested previously, an occasion for remembering the past and thinking about the future. But however much the "remem-ories" of Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Stamp Paid are inter-woven and often intersect in the narrative, Sethe's unspeakable act--her murder of Beloved--seems to have created an almost unbridgeable chasm between herself, her children, and the community, a gulf that only seems to narrow after Paul D's arrival. Having been assured by Paul D that she can "go inside" herself and that he will "Make sure you get back out" ([Bel 47]), Sethe allows herself to think that she can at least count on his understanding the reasons for her actions:

> Trust and rememory, yes, the way she believed it could be when he cradled her before the cooking stove. . . . His waiting eyes and awful human power. The mind of him that knew her own. Her story was bearable because it was his as well--to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other--the things neither had word-shapes for--well, it would come in time: where they led him off to sucking iron; the

> perfect death of her crawling-already? baby.
> (Bel 99)

What Sethe does not anticipate, or perhaps remember, is that Stamp Paid possesses the "word-shapes" for her actions, and when Paul D sees them he will shatter Sethe's illusion of their unity by repeating the community's act of judgement and leaving Sethe at the mercy of Beloved.

Like Eunice's, Rider's, and Butch Beauchamp's, Sethe's is a story that <u>is</u> told, <u>has</u> been told, and Stamp Paid proves this to Paul D when he shows him the newspaper clipping. But just as Paul D's illiteracy prevents him from reading the words on the page and therefore allows him to misrecognize the picture of Sethe that accompanies them, his fear of Sethe's "too-thick love" (Bel [164])--the excess of her desire for freedom that mirrors his own shame at his inability to control his desire for Beloved ("Coupling with her wasn't even fun. It was more like a brainless urge to stay alive" (Bel [264]))--initially prevents him from looking past the account of Sethe's actions and allowing Sethe to pass her story on to him. In fact, Paul D. responds to Stamp Paid's account of his own tragic life, and to the rhetorical question, "How much is a nigger supposed to take?", in precisely the same way as Ike responds to Eunice's suicide--"Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?" (Bel 235). Having for so long locked up the horrors of his own past in "the tobacco tin chest in his heart" (Bel 113), Paul D is

not prepared to confront his own passion and therefore refuses to hear Sethe's story. Like Denver, who as a child is confronted with Nelson Lord's question, "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder?" (Bel [104]), Paul D chooses to go "deaf rather than hear the answer" (Bel 105), chooses to content himself with the misrecognition of Sethe's picture, telling Stamp Paid, "It's a mistake somewhere 'cause that ain't her mouth" (Bel [158]). When he returns to confront Sethe at 124 Bluestone, it is not to listen to Sethe's explanation, but to have his own denial confirmed: "'Can you beat it,' he would ask. And 'Stamp Paid done lost his mind,' she would giggle. 'Plumb lost it'" (Bel 161).

Sethe, however, offers neither denial nor explanation. Instead, she "circles the subject" with "words [Paul D] couldn't make out because they were too close" (Bel 161). As Sethe's story circles around him, he begins to acknowledge the legitimacy of Sethe's need "to get to a place where you could love anything you chose--not to need permission for desire," equating this condition with the very meaning of freedom (Bel [162]), yet it is precisely by demanding her explanation and then refusing to hear the truth beneath her words, that Paul D fails Sethe:

> Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for

> anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off--she could never explain. Because the truth was simple, not a long-drawn-out record of flowered shifts, tree cages, selfishness, ankle ropes and wells. (Bel 163)

Both telling and listening are impossible in this specular encounter in which Paul D's "smile" and "the ever-ready love she saw in his eyes" (Bel [161]) fool Sethe into believing that she can tell him anything, and in which Paul D is compelled by his own shame at "his cold house secret" to condemn Sethe's actions in the most brutal of terms: "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (Bel 165). With this rejection, a denial of his own humanity and hers that echoes Schoolteacher's act of listing Sethe's animal characteristics, Paul D leaves Sethe entirely at the mercy of an unforgiven, and therefore unforgiving, past that is embodied in Beloved, who Denver claims "invented desire" (Bel [240]).

By first portraying Beloved's demand as an undifferentiated and unmediated appetite for experience and voice--"a palm held out for a penny" (Bel 118)--Morrison forces her characters to confront their own appetites, their own demands and desires, through a process which Morrison has Sethe call rememory. More than retrospective narration, rememory is the tangible, even sensual process by which one tries at first to situate oneself specularly <u>in</u> the other's story--one is reminded here of Freud's injunction that

"nothing can be attained in absentia, in effigie" (qtd. in Lacan, Four 254)--but only so that one can ultimately situate one's story next to the other's in a way that is truly performative and revisionary, rather than merely specular. Morrison notes this distinction in the subtle transformation of Sethe's words, "Her story was bearable because it was his as well," into Paul D's desire at the end of the novel "to put his story next to hers" (Bel 273). Such a distinction returns us to a consideration of the Lacanian analytic "pass" beyond transference to "a true speech, which joins the subject to an other subject (rather than an objectified other), on the other side of the wall of language."

In an extraordinary coincidence, Lacan himself uses the term "remémoration" (Wilden 208; translated by Sheridan in Écrits as "recollection") to describe the process of verbal regression into the past necessarily undertaken by the subject in analysis and both facilitated and blocked by the transference, its content vacillating between "the imaginary and the real, for it is situated in both" (Écrits 47). Like the "thought-pictures" Sethe describes as "being over and done with," but "always . . . waiting there for you" (Bel [36]), remémoration "bring[s] back into present time the origins of [the analysand's] own person" (Écrits 47). But for Lacan, these "rememories" must not only be verbalized before they can lead to "full speech" and reveal the "uncon-

scious" which "is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse" (Écrits 49), they must be spoken in a register that can be heard and therefore contextualized by the larger community; in other words, "the discourse is played out . . . on a stage implying the presence not only of the chorus, but also of spectators" (Écrits 47). I quote at length from Lacan:

> The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be rediscovered; usually it has already been written down elsewhere.
>
> - in monuments: this is my body. That is to say, the hysterical nucleus of the neurosis in which the hysterical symptom reveals the structure of a language, and is deciphered like an inscription which, once recovered, can without serious loss be destroyed;
>
> - in archival documents: these are my childhood memories, just as impenetrable as are such documents when I do not know their provenance;
>
> - in semantic evolution: this corresponds to the stock of words and acceptations of my own particular vocabulary, as it does to my style of life and to my character;
>
> - in traditions, too, and even in the legends

> which, in a heroicized form, bear my history; - and, lastly, in the traces that are inevitably preserved by the distortions necessitated by the linking of the adulterated chapter to the chapters surrounding it, and whose meaning will be re-established by my exegesis. (Écrits 50)

Thus, Lacan argues, "[A]nalysis can have for its goal on the advent of a true speech and the realization by the subject of his history in his relation to a future" (Écrits 88).

In Beloved, Morrison works through the monument of the mother's body, the archival documents of the slave narratives, the semantic rhythm of vernacular speech and song, and the legends of African-American people to link the "adulterated" chapter of Sethe's story to "the chapters surrounding it" and to establish not just the meaning of Sethe's actions, but the significance of her life.

Jolted out of their own complacency and pride by Denver's emergence from 124 Bluestone and her requests for help, the members of the community first revise their judgement of Sethe in terms of their own past actions:

> When Ella heard 124 was occupied by something-or-other beating up on Sethe, it infuriated her and gave her another opportunity to measure what could very well be the devil himself against "the lowest yet." There was also something very personal in her fury. Whatever Sethe had done, Ella didn't

> like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. Sethe's crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that; but she could not countenance the possibility of sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy. (Bel [256])

Just as Morrison revises the meaning of Margaret Garner's story through her revision of it in Beloved, the community revises Sethe's story through its performed repetition and revision of the events of "the Misery." As the events of that day repeat themselves--as the unsuspecting and essentially innocent white benefactor Edward Bodwin approaches 124 Bluestone--Sethe is warned this time by the women of the community, who had previously kept their distance and their silence, but this time are singing:

> When the women assembled outside 124, Sethe was breaking a lump of ice into chunks. . . . When the music entered the window she was wringing a cool cloth to put on Beloved's forehead. . . . Both women heard it at the same time and both lifted their heads. As the voices grew louder, Beloved sat up, licked the salt and went into the bigger room. Sethe and she exchanged glances and started toward the window. They saw Denver sitting on the steps and beyond her, where the yard met the road, they saw the rapt faces of thirty neighborhood women. Some had their eyes closed; others looked

> at the hot, cloudless sky. Sethe opened the door and reached for Beloved's hand. Together they stood in the doorway. For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and shimmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words. Building voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees. It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash. (Bel 261)

Invoking the strength and healing power of Baby Suggs Holy whose "commands knocked the pods off horse chestnuts" (Bel [164]) and evoking as well yet another Biblical intertext--the story of Joshua's aural assault on the walls of Jericho--Morrison demonstrates how the community women intervene to save Sethe by preventing her, this time, from killing Bodwin, an act which, while it would amend Sethe's previous "mistake," could only result in her own death. By repeating the performance it should have given seventeen years before and revising the outcome of "the Misery," the community in effect takes responsibility for Sethe's actions and, by so doing, exorcizes Beloved. To them, Sethe may still be the "crazy" woman whose attempt to kill the well-meaning Bodwin makes no sense, but at least they have come

to recognize that it is the insanity, or at least the unaccountability, of them all that both alienates and unites them: "Yeah, well, ain't we all [crazy]?" (Bel 265).

The disturbing conclusion of Morrison's novel, however, suggests that the exorcism of Beloved and the reaccommodation of Sethe by the community mark only a tentative beginning to Sethe's recovery. Sethe's life has been saved, but at a terrible cost: a repetition of the loss of her beloved daughter, an amputation of part of herself, the pain of which is summed up in her words to Paul D: "She was my best thing" (Bel [272]). This symbolic castration shatters the wholeness of the Imaginary relation in which Sethe had played the impossible role of the phallic mother, not just to the ceaselessly demanding Beloved, but to all the "people of the broken necks, of fire-cooked blood and black girls who had lost their ribbons" (Bel 181), and restores her to the place of the lack, the hole in being, from where desire emanates. When Paul D comforts Sethe by telling her that she is her own "best thing," Sethe replies disbelievingly, "Me? Me?" (Bel 273), revising the phallic "I" into the historically situated subject of desire. But, appropriately, since Lacan remarks that the "gap opened up by the effect of the signifiers" is "haunted by the form of a bloody scrap" (Écrits 265), the novel does not end with Sethe's question, but with fragmented traces that linger, like the scar on a child's tombstone, to haunt the text to its final word,

"Beloved," which, because it is also the title of the novel, returns us to its beginning. The story cannot be "passed on" once and for all, because it has only just begun. And if "all trace" of Beloved has disappeared, what surfaces in Morrison's next novel, Jazz, are Joe and Viole(n)t Trace, two other "disremembered and unaccounted for" (and therefore dangerous) children.

In Beloved, Toni Morrison reinscribes an image of the mythic, self-sufficient African-American mother which repeats and yet troubles the specular imagination of William Faulkner's characters only to exorcize the phantasm and demonstrate the utter inability of this image to account for the specificity of the black woman's desire. Moreover, by destabilizing and displacing this overdetermined image rather than replacing it with an alternative myth of black maternity, Morrison re-historicizes and re-presents the African-American woman in such a way as to make her image once again "available for production" in literature. In just such a gesture, Morrison places Sethe's story alongside that of Eunice, allowing both her and Faulkner himself to speak beyond the grave, "to refine and tell again."

I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you--the objet petit a--I mutilate you.

To conclude this chapter, I would like to speculate that, in a text as deeply haunted as Morrison's Beloved, is it possible to spot the ghost of Faulkner? Is it not just a little uncanny, or is it just this critic's imagination run amok, that Edward Bodwin, the white man whose benevolence in providing Sethe his own ancestral home in which to live is almost repaid with an icepick in his forehead, possesses more than just a passing resemblance to William Faulkner? Morrison describes Bodwin as a vain, day-dreaming man from a patrician family, who "preferred his figure astride" (Bel 259), whose black mustache stands in sharp contrast to his white hair, whose life is measured by "the wars he had lived through but not fought in," and whose reputation as a man who supports African-American causes earns him the name "bleached nigger" (Bel [260]). For those not familiar with Faulkner's physiognomy or biography, perhaps the connection between Bodwin and William Cuthbert "Count-No-'Count" Faulkner of Jefferson county seems tenuous indeed. But for those who would indulge my fantasy, consider whether Faulkner haunts Morrison's text, or whether Morrison, like Sethe and Beloved, haunts Faulkner's house. Consider, but do not do either of them the disservice of a reply.

NOTES

[1] Judith Wittenberg points out that Faulkner's dedication suppresses at least one other aspect of Caroline Barr's life when she notes that Barr "had a disturbing tendency to disappear unannounced with a new man periodically and to be gone until she summoned someone to fetch her . . ., thus introducing an unstable element into her loving devotion" (Faulkner 21).

[2] In "The Nameless Women of Faulkner's Go Down, Moses, Doreen Fowler notes that "The vast majority of its daunting number of scholarly works interpret Go Down, Moses as a typical example of the classic American myth which holds that men may achieve true self-realization only in the untrammeled wilderness far away from society and from women" (532n1).

[3] Although Requiem for a Nun was not published until 1951, Faulkner had the idea for it as early as 1933, even before he began working on the organization of Go Down, Moses (published in 1942). In Requiem, Nancy Mannigoe, a black nanny, murders the infant daughter of her white employers, Temple (Drake) and Gowan Stevens.

[4] Eileen Southern notes an 1862 variation of the words to Go Down, Moses as reported by William Wells Brown: "Go down, Abraham, / Away down in Dixie's land; / Tell Jeff Davis / To let my people go" (214).

[5] This typology is invoked when Fonsiba's husband appropriates the language of the founding Puritans and tells Ike that "We are seeing a new era, an era dedicated, as our founders intended it, to freedom, liberty and equality for all, to which this country will be a new Canaan" (GDM 279).

[6] I would not extend this list to include African-American street forms of discourse such as the "dozens" and contemporary (African-American) rap, simply because the latter, even as it has gained acceptance in white popular culture, tends to be overtly counter-hegemonic and the former tends to signify intra-racially.

[7] In Sula and Tar Baby, two novels which are not discussed in this paper, Morrison offers other portrayals of black women that unsettle the stereotypes.

[8] The issue of drowning surfaces again in Morrison's Jazz, which will be discussed briefly in my conclusion.

[9] Another interesting intertextual allusion in Beloved may be Kate Chopin's "Beyond the Bayou," in which a black woman called "La Folle" conquers her fear and crosses the bayou to save her white master's child, Chéri. One of Morrison's riffs is, of course, the reversal of mother/child roles, but the more significant one is probably the alteration of racial identities.

JAZZ: A FINAL NOTE

I started out believing that life was made just so the world would have some way to think about itself, but that it had gone awry with humans because flesh, pinioned by misery, hangs on to it with pleasure. Hangs on to wells and a boy's golden hair; would just as soon inhale sweet fire caused by a burning girl as hold a maybe-yes maybe-no hand. I don't believe that anymore. Something is missing there. Something rogue. Something else you have to figure in before you can figure it out. (Jazz 227-8)

There is no other good than that which may serve to pay the price for access to desire--given that desire is understood here, as we have defined it elsewhere, as the metonymy of our being. The channel in which desire is located is not simply that of the modulation of the signifying chain, but that which flows beneath it as well; that is, properly speaking, what we are as well as what we are not, our being and our non-being--that which is signified in an act passes from one chain to another beneath all the significations. (Lacan Seminar VII 322)

So I missed it altogether. I was sure one would kill the other. I waited for it so I could describe it. I was so sure it would happen. That the past was an abused record with no choice but to repeat itself at the crack and no power on earth could lift the arm that held the needle. I was so sure, and they danced and walked all over me. Busy, they were, busy being original, complicated, changeable--human, I guess you'd say, while I was the predictable one. (Jazz 220)

Blues man. Black and Bluesman. Blacktherefore blue man. Everybody knows your name. Where-did-she-go-and-why man. So-lonesome-I-could-die man. (Jazz 119)

the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire. (Lacan, Seminar VII 319)

I suggested in the introduction that to consider Toni Morrison only either a(n) aesthetic descendant of Faulkner or a (biological) descendant of Faulkner's nursemaid is to place her work vis-à-vis that of Faulkner in an impossible dilemma, one characterized by the trap of Bloomean literary psychodynamics and the dichotomous love-hate web of

transferential or influence relations. Critics guided by this trope, such as Hull and Smith, would have Morrison, as a descendant of Faulkner's "nursemaid," reject all of Faulkner's work because his portrayals of African-American women fail to reflect her (or their) understanding of African-American lived experience. On the other hand, a purely aesthetic or stylistic consideration of Morrison's work in relation to that of Faulkner runs the equally unacceptable risk of obscuring the specificity of her identity as an African-American woman in a society and culture which has constructed racial and gender differences to serve its own purposes. The choice presented by these alternatives is best summed up in the Lacanian dilemma, "Your freedom or your life!" (Four 212).

However, as we have seen, Morrison's identity as an African-American woman and her identity as a writer in the tradition of Faulkner are not mutually exclusive positions; nor does such a polarized view take account of the very complex construction of subjectivity that endlessly complicates intersubjective and intertextual relations, making our work as critics interminably productive. There are, of course, many ways to negotiate the intertextual relationship between the works of Toni Morrison and William Faulkner, but what a Lacanian analysis first demonstrates, I think, is that to choose between absolute difference or absolute identification is only to choose influence, in its

positive or negative capacity.

As one possible intervention in this complex field, my readings between the works of these two authors suggest, I hope, that Morrison escapes the burden of Faulkner's influence precisely by repeating Faulkner's gesture of refusing "to look away," even when all that is exposed to her gaze is the "vacancy in the literature I had any familiarity with and the vacancy was me" (Interview by Davis 419). In speaking to that vacancy, Morrison is also speaking with it, not only in the sense that her works are in conversation with those of Faulkner, but also in the sense that the voices of her narrators and characters, like Sethe's, speak most authentically when they speak (or sing) from the site of vacancy or displacement in her texts, from what Lacan maps in the intersection of "being" and "meaning" as the "alienating vel" (Four 213). This is not to say, I hasten to add, that the African-American characters in Morrison's work mirror the (putative) vacancy of Faulkner's portrayals; to the contrary, Morrison lifts the veil that obscures African-American subjectivity in Faulkner's texts, but only to reveal that what is hidden there is precisely the lack-in-being that inaugurates and sustains human desire and confounds any attempt to submerge it.

We have seen how, in Beloved, Morrison challenges the myth of African-American motherhood to reveal the violent appropriation which has historically underwritten the

colonizing milk bond between white- and African-Americans in a racist society. But we have also seen that her text ultimately challenges the mere transposition of the black woman from the phantasmic site of plenitude and benevolence for the white subject to an equally mythical and equally limiting site of plenitude for the black subject. I would also suggest that Morrison's exploration of motherhood and intersubjectivity in Beloved has the potential to critique certain ways of viewing intertextuality: consider, for example, the way that Joanne Braxton exemplifies the use to which the "moral dictum" of black maternity might be put in describing the black woman writer's "responsibility" for reclaiming and redressing the maternal stereotype through the evocation of a nurturing maternal lineage:

> Afra-American writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Angelou, Gayl Jones, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker call on ancestors from whom they derive strength, and they perform in the "holy heat" of an ancestral presence. As often as not, especially in the case of these writers, the ancestor figure is an outraged mother who embodies the values of sacrifice, nurturance, and personal courage--values necessary to an endangered and embattled minority group. (314)

Such a view of African-American authorship vis-à-vis the phallic mother, it appears to me, denies the specificity of

the black woman writer--a specificity that has everything to do with her position in an "embattled minority group" while it flatly denies her absolute responsibility for the spiritual, economic, and social redemption of that group.

One of Morrison's comments on Beloved announces both the difficulty and the importance of this negotiation, suggesting that the stakes are very high indeed:

> The story seemed to me to yield up a persistent struggle by women, Black women, in negotiating something very difficult. The whole problem was trying to do two things: to love something bigger than yourself, to nurture something; and also not to sabotage yourself, not to murder yourself. (Darling and Morrison 6)

Not to murder yourself: is this not the "lethal factor" to which Lacan refers? But what is this murder, if it is not to be taken literally, except the murder of desire? And what must be sacrificed to sustain one's desire? Lacan makes this clear, too: what must be sacrificed ("liquidated") in analysis is, if not precisely the analyst him/herself, then certainly the analyst qua analyst. Lacan explains:

> It would be odd all the same if this subject who is supposed to know, supposed to know something about you, and who, in fact, knows nothing, should be regarded as liquidated, at the very moment

> when, at the end of the analysis, he begins at last, about you at least, to know something. It is therefore at the moment when he takes on most substance, that the subject who is supposed to know ought to be supposed to have been vaporized. It can only be a question, then, if the term liquidation has any meaning, of the permanent liquidation of that deception by which the transference tends to be exercised in the direction of the closing up of the unconscious. I have already explained to you how it works, by referring to it the narcissistic relation by which the subject becomes an object worthy of love. From his reference to him who must love him, he tries to induce the Other into a mirage relation in which he convinces him of being worthy of love. (Four 267)

Insofar as "love is essentially deception" or a "specular mirage" (Four 268) that fuels the machinery of the transference, Lacan postulates in the beyond of transference nothing other than, "paradoxically," "the discovery [and mutilation] of the analyst" (Four 268): his dis(re)memberment.

In her first published novel, Toni Morrison imagined a young African-American girl who longs for the approval that she thinks only (mirrored) blue eyes can bestow upon her. In her latest novel, Morrison imagines a young, gray-eyed

man who yearns to see, and be seen by, his African-American father. I do not intend, however, to (re)trace this trajectory here. Rather I hope to locate in Jazz one of the many vertiginous sites of mutilation and divestment in Morrison's fiction that announce her return to Faulkner.

What interested Lacan ultimately was not the subject's assimilation of love objects, but rather the subject's gaining of ex-istence. And this must imply an ability to occupy the place of the Other, not in the sense of identifying with someone who is taken to be one's counterpart or little other, but rather in this sense: having appropriated something that does not properly belong to the living, the analysand finds himself detached from humanity and the life cycle. But he is also away from the place of the dead from which he has stolen speech. Now he emerges from the protracted sleep of analysis, not to luxuriate in being but to face the real and perhaps to act according to his desire. (Schneiderman 103)

I am the name of the sound
and the sound of the name
I am the sign of the letter
and the designation of the division.
("Thunder, Perfect Mind," The Nag Hammadi)
(Epigraph to Jazz)

Buried in the intricate scoring of Toni Morrison's latest novel Jazz is a minor riff that explains the maternal origins of Joe Trace and much of the history of Violet Trace's grandmother, True Belle. In this narrative-within-a-narrative, the histories of Violet and Joe, unbeknownst to each other, converge upon two mysteries: the mystery of Joe's abandonment by his mother, whose wildness haunts him and sends him on a life-long search both for her and the wildness that she represents, and the mystery of the disappearance of Golden Gray, the golden-haired boy described so

adoringly by his "mammy," True Belle, that he "tore up [Violet's] girlhood as surely as if [they'd] been the best of lovers" (Jazz 97).

But while this section of Morrison's novel speculatively traces and reconstructs the disappearance or the loss of these two figures, it also contains a story about beginnings, origins, an archetypal fairy-tale about being abandoned by and searching for both fathers and mothers, about "finding" one's way home. Having just learned from True Belle that he is not really a (white) orphan, but the mixed race child of the white woman who has raised him and a black slave on her father's plantation, Golden Gray has set off in search of his father. On his way to find, and possibly to kill, this man, Golden Gray discovers a wild, pregnant black woman and rescues her from the woods, thereby likely rescuing her unborn son, whom "Wild" rejects immediately after giving birth to him. Years later, Joe Trace uses the hunting skills taught to him by Golden Gray's father, Henry Lestory or Hunter's Hunter, to track down his mother, but all he finds are "traces" of Golden Gray in a cave he believes she has occupied, and the reader is left to speculate on what all of this might mean.

At the risk of abandoning all claims to objectivity (which would, of course, be false in any case) and reverting to the kind of affective criticism I have previously scorned, I would argue that nowhere in her work is Morrison

more Faulknerian than in this Jazz interlude. As she had previously done in Song of Solomon, Morrison here repeats Faulkner's use of the hunting theme, again, like Faulkner, to link a young man's initiation into the hunt with his subsequent violence toward a woman.[1] But the quest of Golden Gray is also an "ironic inversion" of Charles Bon's quest for his white father in Absalom, Absalom!, and some passages, like the one I am about to quote, uncannily invoke Faulkner's style. The narrator, an insistent but indeterminable presence, is trying hard not to hate the pampered, racist Golden Gray, but equally hard not to like or love him, as none of these emotions would be "useful" (161): instead, she/he wants to "contemplate his pain and by doing so ease it, diminish it" (161). Like Quentin and Shreve in Absalom, Absalom!, she/he is compelled to imagine a meditation on fathers:

> Only now, [Golden Gray] thought, now that I know I have a father, do I feel his absence: the place where he should have been and was not. Before, I thought everybody was one-armed, like me. Now I feel the surgery. The crunch of bone when it is sundered, the sliced flesh and the tubes of blood cut through, shocking the bloodrun and disturbing the nerves. They dangle and writhe. Singing pain. Waking me with the sound of itself, thrumming when I sleep so deeply it strangles my

> dreams awa). There is nothing for it but to go away from where he is not to where he used to be and might be still. Let the dangle and the writhe see what it is missing; let the pain sing to the dirt where he stepped in the place where he used to be and might be still. I am not going to be healed, or to find the arm that was removed from me. I am going to freshen the pain, point it, so we both know what it is for. (Jazz [158])

Not only does this passage uncannily evoke Faulkner's style in Absalom, Absalom!, it also locates the site of the uncanny itself as the obsessive, painfully joyful, restaging of primal loss, which is also, as we have seen, the site of the analytic experience in which the patient lays, for the analyst's admiration and approval, the gift of his symptom at the analyst's feet. But when Golden Gray encounters his father and offers him the gift of his symptom--the pain of his amputation--Lestory neither refuses it, like Thomas Sutpen, nor embraces his new-found son. Rather, he says merely, "I never knew you were in the world" (Jazz [170]), and then, when pressed by Golden Gray to react to his news: "A son ain't what a woman say. A son is what a man do" (Jazz [172]).

In Morrison's complex novel of origins, loss, and desire for recognition, might I be excused for finding yet another allegory for the intertextuality I have tried so

hard to chart in the previous pages? Not an allegory, in spite of the allusion above to mothers and fathers, of Bloomean dimensions, in which strong sons compete with even stronger fathers for poetic dominance, but an allegory of a hybrid orphan in search of some metaphysical, grounding myth of origin (not Lestory, but le story), some cure for his/her pain. We have already seen, in my reading of Beloved, how this search is doomed and how the myth of phallic motherhood, at least, is shattered in order to restore to the subject her own desire. In Jazz, a novel in which many of the female characters refuse to become mothers, Morrison continues to explore the role of desire in defining subjectivity and intersubjectivity, extending her exploration to the role of fatherhood in the story of Golden Gray. With Henry Lestory's response to the son he "never knew [was] in the world," Morrison's narrator deflates the myth of biological fatherhood and restores the phallus to its function of signification and mediator of desire.

The paternal metaphor may indeed be, as Lacan admits, a myth, but without it, without the Law that it erects, there would be no signification, nothing to dis(re)member, no "something [rogue] to surface" in the works of Toni Morrison, and therefore no music to be heard at all. Just as the incomplete story of Golden Gray and Wild remains underneath the surface of Jazz, ready to erupt when we least expect it, we are reminded again of those qualities which

Morrison claims occupy African-American art forms, including her own writing:

> Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. There may be a long chord, but no final chord. And it agitates you. Spirituals agitate you, no matter what they are saying about how it is all going to be. There is something underneath them that is incomplete. (Interview by McKay 411)

By tracing the scars of Faulkner's discourse in selected works of Toni Morrison, I hope only to have opened more fissures through which desire can surface and in which the music of intertextuality can be heard again.

NOTES

[1] See John N. Duvall's article "Doe Hunting and Masculinity in Song of Solomon and Go Down, Moses."

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